

**Peer-reviewed article****Research ethics and diversity of worldviews: Integrated worlds and ubuntu****Moyra Keane**

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[moyrakeane9@gmail.com](mailto:moyrakeane9@gmail.com)**Abstract**

Many scholars have argued for inclusion of indigenous knowledges in all levels of teaching, as well as a re-thinking of research approaches in African and other southern contexts. However, methodology in indigenous knowledge research in southern Africa over the past few years shows only a few examples of an actual change in approach, genre, data collection or ethical considerations. This paper deals with just one of these aspects: research ethics. I argue that ethical considerations affect all aspects of the research process and hence affect how we construct and validate new knowledges. The paper aims to disrupt conventional ethical assumptions through illustrative research examples. It draws together three frameworks into a synthesised model to clarify different worldview perspectives that may be applied to research. The discussion and model may serve as an educational tool for researchers, particularly in the global South. I draw on both indigenous knowledge literature and three research projects located in rural South Africa to argue for the need to reconsider standard ethical norms. Standard ethical protocols are inadequate in providing guidance to students and researchers for complex contexts and diverse cultural values and indigenous worldviews.

## Introduction

As research into indigenous knowledge has increased and been promoted by funding grants and policies, there has followed an increasing call for the appropriate use of indigenous methodologies (Mkabela, 2005; Chilisa, 2012; Odora Hoppers & Richards, 2012; Mpofu, 2016; Khupe & Keane, 2017; Seehawer, 2018). An aspect of indigenous knowledge research that needs rethinking is ethical protocols, especially in participatory research. These protocols need to align with an Afrocentric worldview and address entrenched power assumptions; they need to include transformative dissonance and reciprocity (Barnes, 2018). Indeed, such a review of ethics is a relevant aspect of a decolonized curriculum agenda.

Research that has exploited indigenous communities has been exposed and criticised by African and other indigenous scholars (Odora Hoppers, 2002; Smith, 2009; Chilisa, 2012). These scholars have provided specific recommendations for researchers, yet courses on ethics and university practices remain largely aligned to a conventional scientific paradigm. Formal ethics requirements of universities, while essential, are arguably culturally biased and more strongly located in medical and quantitative paradigms (Keane, 2018). Arguing from an ecological perspective, Trisos, Auerbach and Katti (2021:6) concur: “creating a more inclusive ethical practice ... requires institutions to change incentives away from individualistic perspectives and towards recognizing contributions that build knowledge collectively”. Even a decade ago, Metz (2012:99) pointed out that writers had started to interpret ethics from new perspectives in sub-Saharan Africa so that “any ignorance of African values on the part of scholars [is] self-imposed”. Metz writes from a philosophical stance of ubuntu citing Nkondo’s (2007:91) exposition of African community values as being tied to a community-bound identity and “commitment to the good of the community”.

Ubuntu (humanness) may be seen as living with the appreciation that our existence is dependent on the existence of others. Ubuntu is a worldview as well as a moral philosophy: the very essence of being human (Tutu, 1999). Ubuntu can be seen as spanning ontological, epistemological and axiological domains (Chilisa, 2012), where all beings and nature are ontologically interconnected. Each person’s humanity is experienced through relationship. Ubuntu visualizes a community built upon interdependent relationships, what Seehawer (2018) calls ‘relational ethics’. I use this perspective to provide a basis for reconsidering ethics in participatory research.

My starting point here follows Mignolo’s assertion that decolonised research is restricted through conventional and prescriptive ethical applications and guidelines (Mignolo, 2011). The community exists as an interconnected being; connected also to ancestors and nature, to a living world seen and unseen. The values that arise from this worldview are ones of communalism, cohesion, respect, generosity, mutual care, consensus and tradition (Metz, 2007).

In this paper, by using more holistic, culturally-diverse and inclusive frameworks, such as ubuntu, I problematize how ethics plays out in research communities showing the need for the cultivation of awareness and moral decision-making in consultation with participants or co-researchers. My own position is that of an outsider, of acknowledging the limits of my education in becoming an educator and researcher in Southern Africa (see Keane, Khupe & Muza, 2016). In my own teaching of ethics courses, indigenous knowledge and in supervision, I notice that the common focus on ethical

'clearance' in many postgraduate courses misses the complexity and diversity of our context, as well as the depth of reflection needed and articulated in the South African Qualification Framework outcomes<sup>1</sup>. At Level 10 (Criteria for Doctoral candidature), the outcome relating to ethics states that the candidate should demonstrate ability to: identify, address and manage emerging ethical issues; to advance processes of ethical decision-making, including monitoring and evaluation of the consequences of these decisions. To this end our teaching, especially at postgraduate level in a South African context, needs a decolonised lens on ethics.

I focus on the wider and more complex dimensions of ethics in indigenous knowledge research and argue on the one hand against romanticising ubuntu, and on the other, that these more human perspectives of community-centred being could contribute to mitigating against mere legalistic and compliance approaches to ethics in research projects. This exposition of ethical indigenous research practice is also not about 'cultural sensitivity' but rather about the fundamental questioning of assumptions, policies, and worldviews that underlie our research and teaching. Inevitably concepts of virtue, integrity, autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, obligation, accountability and taboos frame the axiological underpinning of research projects. Other ways of considering researcher obligations are through the decisions that need to be made around Truth, Care and Justice which are often in conflict in practical contexts. Researchers are faced with moral decisions in every step of a research process. In African contexts, some of these decisions require seeing the world differently.

I consider a continuum of approaches and understandings rather than essentializing a Western-African dichotomy. Sometimes the term 'culture' is used and sometimes 'worldview', depending on the literature and the nuance of the argument. 'Culture' refers here to commonly accepted and valued practices of the community and 'worldview' to an ontology, a deeper and usually subconscious way of our seeing and being in the world. Indeed, some frameworks that attempt to categorise cultural characteristics could be considered more from a metaphorical perspective than in terms of a strict geographical demarcation. Schieffer and Lessom (2016) position research from four perspectives: Northern path of Reason; Southern path of Relationships; Eastern path of Renewal; and Western path of Realisation. They theorise that these integral research paths are culturally rooted. From this framework, it is apparent that conventional research ethics relies less on the relational and renewal (or healing) paths than it does on the reason and realisation paths. That is to say, in scientific research, Scieffer and Lessom's 'Northern' perspective is usually dominant. This distinction between 'northern' and 'southern' cultural ways of knowing and working in the world has resonances with the work of Nisbett (2003). Nisbett's research explores patterns of thinking and cultural ways of knowing and valuing across diverse countries. As one example (presented in the next section), not all cultures hold reason as the pre-eminent value for knowing.

Nisbett's (2003) 'Geography of thought' shows up the cultural leanings and tensions across concepts of Change, Constants, and Holism which have strong implications for how we (as researchers) approach values in a community. Some of the Western, taken-for-granted intellectual values and criteria for judgement may be disturbed by references to (for example) Asian culture which may claim that logical consistency (a Western hallmark of intellectual competence) is regarded as intellectually immature. While such values in different cultures may be surprising if they are not widely held in one's

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.saqa.org.za/sites/default/files/2019-11/level\\_descriptors.pdf](https://www.saqa.org.za/sites/default/files/2019-11/level_descriptors.pdf)

own, they may also show up some of our fixed ways of thinking and valuing, and then of teaching and assisting students in the design of research projects. Even arguing for such distinctions is ironically building on the cognitive genres that are being criticised in such debates.

Nisbett (2003), whose thesis explains the origins of cultural values and thought across a geographical continuum, cautions against compartmentalizing different nations or individuals within nations as there is often a difference between ‘what people do’ and ‘what people should do/might do/can do’. Some individuals may also align to a culture outside of their native community; or be bi-cultural. (Of course, there are other underlying quasi-cultural soups that we are immersed in such as consumerism and neo-liberalism.) Ingelhart and Wetzel’s (2005) Cultural Map tries to give global cultural comparisons on a matrix of values: traditional values versus secular-rational values, and survival values versus self-expression values. These frameworks help to provide a foil for re-appreciating the complexity of ethics in research and are presented briefly along with the Social Emotional Ethical Learning (SEE Learning<sup>2</sup>) matrix which aims to promote ethical literacy across countries and educational levels. The SEE Learning programme, championed by Emory University, in the USA, was a response to the crisis of ethical action in the world.

This paper has a similar intended purpose, to bring to the fore consideration of ethics as a core aspect of postgraduate teaching and research rather than a bureaucratic formality. As an aspect of cognitive justice, in the creation of new knowledge, or reappraisal of current knowledge, a deeper focus on the teaching of ethics is needed, especially within the repeated calls for decolonisation of curricula. Questions arise: whose ethics? Who decides? While I focus here on research and research courses and teaching, if scholars are to make a contribution to resolving societies’ problems, a clear foundation would be that of ethics. The frameworks I discuss provide alternative ways of rethinking research ethics to those that assume a Western/Northern/scientific axiology and legalistic protocols. These frameworks that distinguish knowledge purposes, knowledge validation processes, community values, and ways of thinking will of course have a bearing on research methodology whether explicitly or implicitly. Hence these frameworks could assist with rethinking teaching ethical principles, approaches and assumptions.

### **Ethical clearance: Clearing ethics out of the way**

The often careful parameters of ethics protocols within universities do not always achieve their purpose in protecting researchers and the university against legal dilemmas arising from ethical misconduct (Beckman, 2017). Cannella and Lincoln (2007:315) argue that even within conventional scientific research, research ethics need to comprise of more than a set of regulations. This argument speaks directly to the learning outcomes expected in the qualification framework already mentioned for all levels of education in South Africa. Cannella and Lincoln (2007:315) contrast predatory ethics with dialogical ethics. The standards and requirements (in predatory ethics) involve: “a regulatory enterprise that creates an illusion of ethical practice [while the latter is seen] as a philosophical concern for equity and the imposition of power within the conceptualization and practice of research itself”. Following regulations and policies may provide merely an illusion of ethical research or stated

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<sup>2</sup> SEE Learning: Social Emotional and Ethical Learning. Centre for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics. Emory University.

more vehemently, as in Schrag's trenchant attack: "ethics committees impose silly restriction [and] ethics review is a solution in search of a problem" (Schrag, 2011:120).

In disrupting the place of ethical compliance in teaching and the pursuit of knowledge, (post)qualitative research goes further in unsettling our assumption that knowledge should be the inquiry quest, with the subjugation of ontology and ethics. Hence Barad's (2007:6) coinage of the term "ethico-onto-epistemology". Mbembe (2015:26) also argues that "a new understanding of ontology, epistemology, ethics and politics has to be achieved. It can only be achieved by overcoming anthropocentrism". This paper offers a rationale for widening our understanding of how ethics may be taught in research methodology in various geographical contexts and particularly in indigenous knowledge contexts and research. By discussing critiques of current conventions and drawing on existing concepts and models of ways of knowing, the synthesised framework presented offers a reflective lens for reconsidering ethics.

The onus on indigenous knowledge researchers to question ethics in knowledge exploration is even greater than the critique of current ethical norms suggested by Canella and Lincoln (2007). Indigenous knowledge researchers need to find alternatives to simple compliance with regulations. This is not to say that ethical standards should be thrown out – it rather raises the question of their limitations and the dangers of re-inscribing a Western cultural bias. The South African San<sup>3</sup> Institute (SASI) raises similar concerns and provides criteria for research that require researchers to not only include, but be guided by community at every stage of the research (SASI, 2007). In this paper, I consider how ethical research standards are not always universally moral, applicable and relevant. How may ethical considerations be re-considered to align with research within an indigenous knowledge worldview? Can teaching continue (as it often does) with a detached approach to research ethics claiming that the knowers and the known are segregated? How may we negotiate acts of "commission and omission" (Fins, 1999; Reamer, 2015) that require refined presence not only of self but self-in-community? Western knowledge production (the purpose of much research), and policies guiding that research, are "potentially restrictive if universalised ... as they prevent the imagination of other possibilities" (Chiumbu, 2017:2).

### Alternative conceptual frameworks

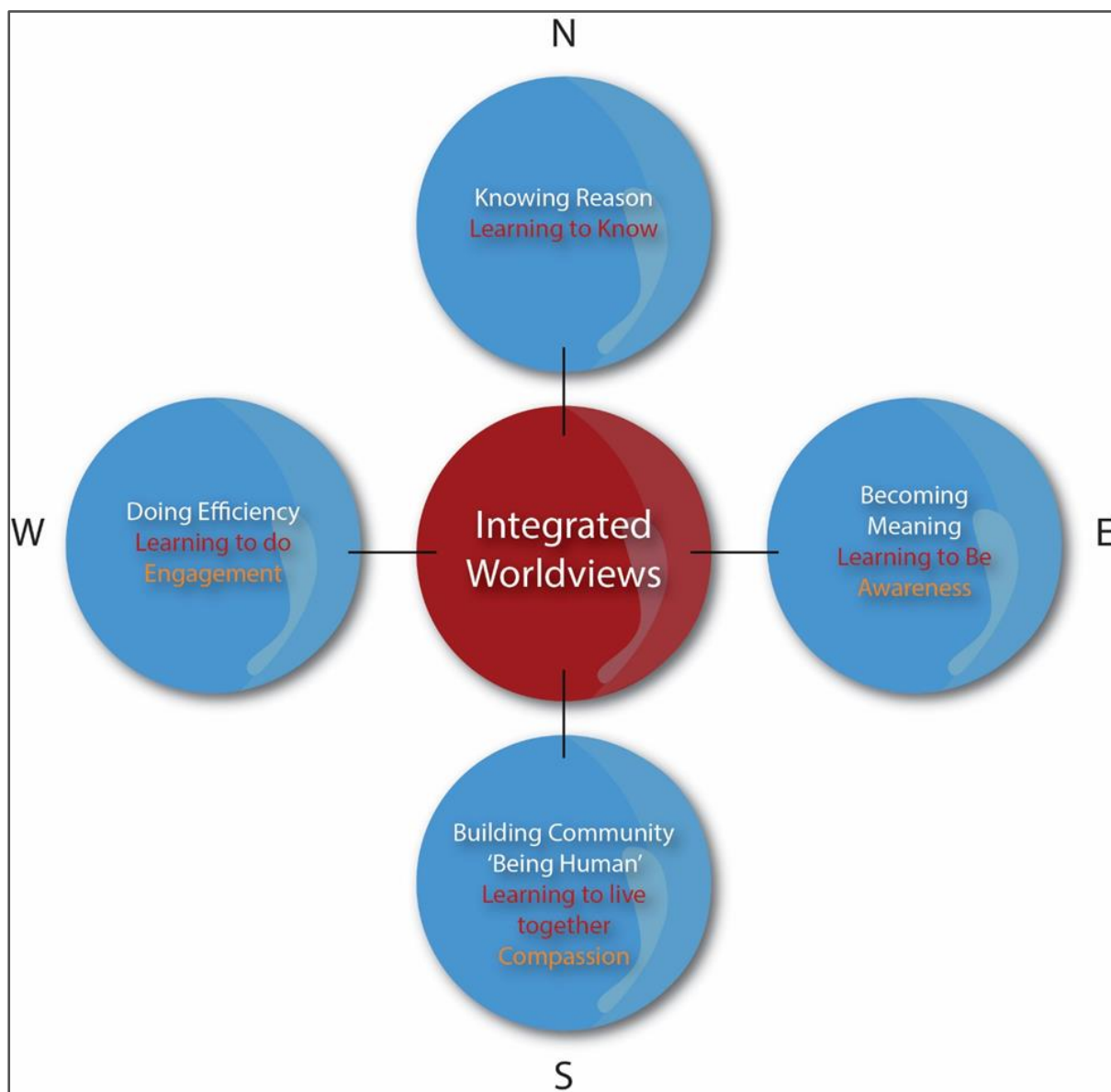
While much has been written about the often-exploitative nature of Western science research on indigenous communities, the hegemonic worldview assumptions underlying some of the stipulations of research ethics committees need a more radical critique than simply tightening restrictions around research. The conceptual frameworks that contribute to seeing research, knowledge and ethics through different lenses are synthesised in Figure 1 and presented as a geographical metaphor of North, South, West and East. In differentiating distinctive aspects of knowing, a clearer and more holistic view of ethics in knowledge construction may be possible. The three frameworks synthesised here are 'Social Emotional and Ethical Learning' (SEE Learning, 2017); UNESCO's 'International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century' reviewed by Tawil and Couroureaux (2013); and Integral Worlds (Shieffer, nd). SEE Learning programmes aim to develop: (1) Awareness, (2)

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<sup>3</sup> The San, also termed Bushmen, are first-nation people of Southern Africa. See <http://www.san.org.za/>

Compassion, and (3) Engagement. Each of these has a possible leaning towards a specific worldview domain.

The Integral Worlds Framework (Shieffer, nd) resonates with the UNESCO report (Tawil & Couroureaux, 2013) on four aspects of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. These different aspects of learning are, of course, all necessary. Science teaching and research is more aligned with the Northern perspective (Learning to know; asking ‘What is True?’). Applied innovations may also align more with the Western perspective: learning to do; asking ‘What is needed/ How can we solve this?’. Learning to be is more likely to be a teaching aim in philosophy and theology, asking ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What matters?’. And in the South, learning to live together may align more with the prevalent types of pedagogy (collaborative, team-based, inclusive), and research that is participatory and draws on indigenous knowledge. These frameworks, integrated with Shieffer’s model, could be represented as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** A synthesis of compatible frameworks to illustrate the contribution of emphasis from the global South, compared to the West, North, and East.

Such a representation may contribute to disrupting our ‘taken for granted’ stance on values and views of what counts as knowledge purposes. From integral worlds: in the South, there is ‘Building Community – Being Human’ which I propose aligns with UNESCO’s aspect of ‘learning to live together’; and the SEE Learning of ‘Compassion’. Ethics needs to be more firmly and primarily based in this dimension that sees the world as interdependent and has an ubuntu worldview that is Afrocentric. When rooted in ubuntu, “actions are right roughly insofar as they are a matter of living harmoniously with others or honouring communal relationships” (Metz & Gaie, 2010:273). While conventional ethical clearance protocols are based on non-maleficence, this is not as internally situated within the researcher as ‘compassion’ – feeling with another.

In the East is ‘meaning’, which aligns with UNESCO’s aspect of ‘learning to be’ and the SEE Learning of ‘Awareness’. This aspect encourages the inspection of motives, reflection on one’s own assumptions, and the stance of ‘unknowing’. From awareness comes clarity and wider possibilities and capabilities which may help us to see and live across worlds and realms. Knowledge creation may include transmitted and intuitive knowing. This links well with the intention of mindful inquiry research which aims to reduce suffering (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

In the North is ‘Knowing – Reason’ which aligns with UNESCO’s aspect of ‘learning to know’. This is possibly the more traditional perspective, aligning knowledge with reason, analysis, evidence, and scientific method. If this aspect is not inclusive of the other three perspectives, the ethical imperatives considered in research could be limited (as discussed previously).

In the West is ‘Doing - Efficiency’ which aligns with UNESCO’s aspect of ‘learning to do’ and the SEE Learning of ‘Engagement’. The pressing imperatives to ensure impact of research and particularly postgraduate research pushes researchers to focus on this aspect.

The categorising of these four worldviews is, of course, a simplification. There are links and overlaps. From awareness could arise compassion which could lead to action-engagement. From engagement comes a realisation of interconnection with others and nature. From this engagement comes ‘benefit and well-being’ (SEE Learning, 2017). Part of the value of the distinctions is in illustrating emphasis of focus. The following examples may be considered from the SEE Learning framework. From practicing care and compassion in a research project comes safety and trust from students and a community and out of this may arise truth and wisdom – as opposed to ‘data’ that may be limited in scope and authenticity. An example may be moving from Factual truth to Negotiated truth to Healing truth (Keane, 2006) – as described in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa (TRC, 1998). In decolonised research these notions of whose truth is reported, and which truth is foregrounded, is a matter of ethics - taking into account worldview perspectives that are not rooted in a Northern or Western paradigm only. I discuss these aspects in some examples below.

The Nobel Peace Prize winners, Rev. Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama, say that ethics are about becoming ‘more human’ (Dalai Lama, 1999; Dalai Lama, Tutu & Adams, 2016), which we do by developing a good heart and knowing our need for each other (Tutu, 1999). This is not a vague fleeting feeling but a diligently developed empathy and compassion; as well as recognising our interconnectedness (Dalai Lama, 1999:64; Dalai Lama, Tutu & Abrams, 2016). This is a practice of ubuntu which Tutu (1999) explains as the essence of being human. This also implies that ethics is not

something that is taught by pointing to ethical clearance forms and simply granted by an ethics committee, but is an intention, quality and commitment that needs to be cultivated. Floyd and Arthur (2012) make a distinction between External ethical engagement, which is the traditional ethical compliance requirement, and a deeper Internal ethical engagement, which concerns moral dilemmas and complex researcher relationships.

Smith (2009) also emphasises the aspect of developing morality rather than compliance or reliance on rules. Her argument links to the work on ethics of omission and commission. However, I am not sure that this is sufficient. From an ubuntu perspective, the question may extend to 'What does my community need from me? To answer this question, a supervisor and researcher are called upon to be courageous, aware and caring. This again is a call for the cultivation of ethics rather than abiding with compliance.

### **Examples and questions: Ethical perspectives in participatory research in South Africa**

The following steps in the research story are set out as examples from research projects in rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa (Khupe & Keane, 2017; Keane, 2006). The brief examples do not necessarily flow in the linear way presented, but are at times iterative and renegotiated across situations. The examples are, however, given in sequence: from deciding on a topic, accessing a community, considering ethical principles, collecting data and reporting.

#### *Starting out: Purposes*

How is one invited into a research community? Whose purposes are served? What does the community need and what are their interests? Who decides? Should a researcher have some responsibility to participants outside the research agenda? To what extent does a researcher become part of a community? Khupe (2014) mentions ubuntu obligations of visiting families to participate in special ceremonies, or to assist with small requests as part of conviviality. On a larger scale too: is research unethical if it ignores related pressing humanitarian, societal and environmental issues that are in need of redress? Foregrounding and attending to the initial decision of what is worth knowing, who wants to know, and who asks the question, requires engagement with ethical dilemmas. In the two projects cited, the initial negotiation of the already set-out research caused some consternation among the participating community. A research project investigating science curricula in local schools was certainly not a priority for community elders, nor even for school principals and teachers. Approaching the study from a 'Northern' perspective of ethical protocols that simply require participants to 'be informed' and to 'participate voluntarily' is assuming a particular power dynamic and accepting the paternalistic role of a distant community of 'experts'. A negotiated purpose would be more appropriate. This would align more with a Southern perspective of learning to live together and building community.

#### *Joining a community*

Once a research proposal has been approved by an institution, there is still permission to be sought from other authorities and participants. The research needs further approval and signed documents. Regulations are clear – at least from the research institute's perspective – which is one perspective.



While any ethics committee has standard processes in place, these are designed by the authorising body. Certainly, these are necessary yet they are also limited, as I argue in the examples that follow.

**Permission.** In a traditional South African community, a researcher is expected to gain permission even to proceed with seeking permission after lengthy meetings with elders; being introduced to the ancestors who decide whether the research may proceed – through the agreement with the Nkosi (Chief) and whole community. This is all a bit of a stretch of imagination for university research ethics committees whose guidelines and processes are based primarily on medical models.

**Guidance.** The researcher needs a community advisor and co-researchers within the community. A university may consider a Principal Investigator or Supervisor sufficient to guide the research but this assumes that the academic/research institution has the sole power and expertise to decide on ethical protocols.

**Negotiations.** Having conventional ethical ‘clearance’ assumes that research goes according to the plan set out. The plan is usually set out by the researcher and institution in the absence of community elders. The hubris here is obvious. Ongoing ethical decisions and dilemmas need discussing, with elders mediating conflicting agendas. Moral decisions need to be based on awareness, compassion and engagement. The nature of negotiation is ‘learning to live together’ – the contribution of a Southern perspective.

**Anonymity and Confidentiality.** In a rural community research project “the notion of the research anonymity was viewed [by elders] as insulting and condescending. No-one wished to be anonymous. The concept is largely fictitious anyway: when the research derives from an actual setting and events” (Keane, 2006:305). Anonymity also assumes research participants would be embarrassed by the knowledge that results from the research, while the researchers will walk away with valuable knowledge that they will put their names to. The elders in this research example received the promise of ‘confidentiality’ with bemusement if not suspicion. It made no sense in a project where the community all knew each other and relied on trust and transparency in the understanding of interconnectedness.

**Informed and Signed Consent.** In our research (Malcolm, Gopal, Keane & Kyle, 2009), this too was problematic and created suspicion. ‘Informed consent’ is of course difficult in a negotiated project where no-one quite knows what is being consented to; the outcomes of the research are unpredictable, as are the long-term consequences. It is expedient to claim that an ethics ‘information sheet’ satisfies one’s moral obligations. In community research meetings, participants may find a sense of direction and a commitment to a process, rather than a clear understanding of pre-determined goals and outcomes. It certainly helps for researchers to translate information into a local language and ensure that there are satisfactory discussions and negotiations so that everyone involved can make fair decisions. However, the requirements of ethics committees can be seen in these examples to be more rooted in ‘getting things done’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘reason’, and individual rights – values from the Western and Northern worldview paradigms rather than the Southern and Eastern paradigms of ‘becoming’ and ‘being together’.

*Voluntary participation versus long-time commitment and responsibility*

The norm of emphasising individual rights is an example of a potential cultural bias. In research in some rural schools (see Keane, 2008; Malcolm, Gopal, Keane & Kyle, 2009), the researchers found that community members did not assume they had the autonomy to participate in interventions without wide discussion involving everyone from students, parents, teachers, principals, elders and the Chief. There were discussions about ‘responsibilities’, and who would benefit. In this project<sup>4</sup>, the Induna (Headman) and school principal said that the students could participate. When we<sup>5</sup> produced forms for parents to sign the Induna and principal’s response was one of polite irritation (from a philosophical perspective as well as a practical one) (see Keane, 2006). This is not to say students were not consulted – the point simply illustrates the taken-for-granted norms of privileging individual rights. This is perhaps an example of ‘relational ethics’ – not just from the researcher-participant relationship but that of all concerned, what Seehawer (2018) refers to as a realm of belonging. Seehawer also describes ubuntu ethics as ‘relating positively to others’. While harmony is a key value in ubuntu, it may not mean that robust conversations are not necessary, nor that disagreements do not occur.

*Data methods*

In participatory, Afrocentric research, ethical considerations need to take into account journals of local research assistants, elder’s voices, data from dreams and messages from ancestors (Mpofu, 2016). It is impossible to deal with these aspects through employing conventional contractual ethics and approaching research from only the Northern-Western paradigms.

*Data analysis involvement*

In a community where everyone has contributed to different kinds of knowledge and truths, the putting together of resultant learning and understanding needs community consensus and dialogue, as well as moral discretion. What knowledge can be taken out of the community? What learning should be left unsaid? What counts as data and who interprets the data? To answer these questions, a researcher cannot rely on reason alone.

*Reporting: Omission and commission*

I have included in the reporting of our research project a mixture of fact–fiction, anonymity-acknowledgement and disclosure-omission. I trust readers to participate in the ethical responsibility of promoting the well-being of participants. (Keane, 2006:308)

Factual reporting of ‘truths’ may be harmful to some community participants, as may ‘not reporting’ be to others. Research reporting is inevitably selective. Refining awareness and the commitment to care and compassion, as well as engaging community can assist in navigating conflicting versions of ‘do-no-harm’.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Imbumba: Working Together – a community project in Chibini’: A community report translated into isiZulu and compiled by community research participants in Chibini, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

<sup>5</sup> The researchers in this project (see Keane, 2008; Malcolm, Gopal, Keane & Kyle, 2009)

### Benefits

There are numerous ways that African-centred research may promote community well-being that honour and show respect for communities. Some of these ways may be co-writing the derived knowledge in a community book in an indigenous language (Khupe & Keane 2017), co-presenting at conferences, and providing introductions to other communities (networking) that may extend both knowledge and material benefit. While the knowledge outcome of research is important (a Northern perspective), from a Southern perspective ‘building community’ and ‘becoming more human’ are more important: “a primary purpose of human inquiry is not so much to search for truth but to heal” (Reason & Bradbury, 2002:10).

### Implications for future research

I have touched on illustrative examples and set out questions to show the limitations of one worldview perspective on ethics in research. From an Afrocentric view – a Southern view – research ethics committees and researchers working with participants need to expand their awareness of conventional protocols. This is consonant with the assertion by Bozalek that in research “no one is exempt from interrogating their positionality and their beliefs” (Bozalek, 2011:469). Research with indigenous participants needs to not only acknowledge the bias of traditional research assumptions but to explore the mind-spaces, frameworks, intentions, values, ways of knowing that limit our development by validating certain ways of knowing and being above others. An integrative ethical framework that includes diverse worldviews could contribute not only to knowledge production but to our becoming more whole and more human. More research examples around moral and ethical approaches could contribute to more meaningful knowledge creation.

### Conclusions

The contribution African sagacity has to play is [that]... in time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift ever – a more human face.

(Coetzee & Roux, 2002:85)

I argue that there is the need for supervisors and researchers to be aware of the possible bias in conventional ethical protocols, as well as the possible colonising effects that have led to some worldviews dominating the generation and validation of knowledge through conventional moral assumptions. It is also clear that the African lived philosophy of ubuntu has the potential to be a benefit not only, of course, in itself, but in rethinking research ethics and integrity. Worldview validity requires a meta-perspective that is open to acknowledging the limitations of the bases of our moral decisions and reconsidering ethical principles from a southern perspective using an Integrated Worlds Framework. This perspective values our interconnectedness, compassion, harmony and being-in-community.

Ethics and research integrity from this perspective emphasise ongoing engagement in the whole research process from conceptualisation, funding, research topic and purposes, methodology, data generation, analysis and reporting. A decolonised ethics education needs to develop the researcher’s awareness of different cultural contexts, and the ability to take responsibility for negotiated moral

decisions. To this end it could be both fair and beneficial to have indigenous knowledge elders sitting on ethics committees (Khupe & Keane, 2017) and for a more flexible assessment of ethics applications in participatory research especially with indigenous communities. Such moves may result in more inclusive research protocols that encourage a genuine ethical engagement that contributes to a more humane world.

### Acknowledgments:

I wish to acknowledge all co-researchers and participants in the studies quoted here, and particularly Nkosi Ndlovu who facilitated my access to the community.

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