

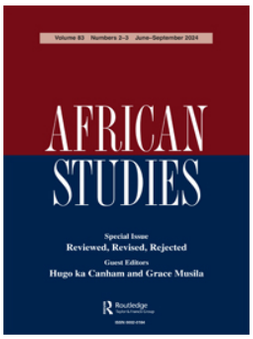
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Revision as Reflection On Writing from the Global South

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African Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/cast20

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To cite this article: Dina Ligaga (2024) Revision as Reflection: On Writing from the Global South, African Studies, 83:2-3, 167-180, DOI: 10.1080/00020184.2024.2440333

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2024.2440333

Published online: 07 Jan 2025.

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AFRICAN STUDIES
2024, VOL. 83, NOS. 2–3, 167–180
https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2024.2440333

Routledge
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Revision as Reflection: On Writing from the Global South

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the idea of revision is considered a useful moment in the writing phase to reflect on what it means to write from the Global South. Towards this, the article is contextualised within scholarship that highlights the lopsided publication terrains between the Global North and Global South and reflects on what it means to think about more considerate, generous, and productive ways of doing research as a more appropriate approach in the Global South. The argument maintained in the article is that by looking at the academic writer as an element in a larger process, it becomes possible to ponder on the role that interventions such as revision play in re-engaging and re-animating the writing process for purposes of productivity in contexts of global inequality. Examples are drawn from autobiographical accounts of the revision process as an opportunity to reflect on the care work that goes into publishing practices in the context of the Global South. I focus on my experiences working in the interdisciplinary field of African popular culture over a span of a decade, and what revision or being revised, has meant within the broader context of critical reflection.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 20 February 2023
Accepted 6 August 2024

KEYWORDS
reflection; slow thinking; generous scholarship; Global South

Introduction

Scholarship on publishing in the Global South variously show that there is an inherent lopsidedness in the production of and attention given to this scholarship in relation to global academic practices (Collyer 2018; Macharia 2016; Musila 2019). The lopsidedness reveals broader issues in the field of knowledge production that demonstrate what Fran Collyer (2018, 18) refers to as the 'systematic boundaries and mechanisms of exclusion across and between countries and regions of the world'. As Collyer and others show, Global South scholarship tends to be viewed as a source of raw data, case studies and experiential knowledge, whereas northern scholarship is marked by assumptions about its universality and applicability in a variety of contexts, regardless of social difference. Collyer's observations on global patterns of academic publishing, as well as the marginal status of Global South publishing is at the core of years of debate among scholars of African studies. Early debates spoke of academic dependencies in what Paulin Hountondji (1990, 7) terms 'extroverted' scholarly practices by Global South scholars who were seen to overly depend on Global North scholars to process and interpret raw data. Theoretical

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and methodological insights were extracted from the Global North to be applied to Global South scholarship. In this convoluted matrix, Global South scholars were imagined to be caught in a never-ending loop of unproductivity. A more recent turn in the debate shows a different understanding of the lopsided publishing practices. Postcolonial and decolonial scholars have variously exposed ways in which epistemic power ensures that local experiences and knowledges in the Global South do not impact global writing and intellectual practices (Ampofo 2016, 9). Decoloniality as espoused by scholars like Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020), Winston Mano and Viola Milton (2021) and other African scholars and that mirror conversions taking place in Latin American scholarship, stress the need to decolonise knowledge production and circulation. For these scholars, it is vital to pay attention to epistemic dissonances between Global North theoretical dominances and local experiences.

As such, more scholars are forging ways forward in thinking about African scholarship in relation to the rest of the world. In this turn in the debate, scholars are emphasising the need to focus on the local as a source of theoretical and methodological knowledge. However, given the dominance of northern academic structures, much of the work requires a re-look at scenarios and experiences shaping African studies. Akosua Ampofu for instance argues for the need to carefully lay out the significance of African studies for future generations if we are to retain its power to shape knowledge production on the continent (Ampofu 2016). Ampofu (2016, 8) identifies the link 'between resistance and enabling discourses' that points towards that future. Scholars such as Keguro Macharia (2016) and Grace Musila (2019) have variously argued that part of that revisiting includes an honest look at what is valued in African studies, both from locations of the Global North and within the Global South. In one such argument, Macharia (2016) urges for a rethinking of queer African studies by unmooring it from its locatedness within area studies. Macharia asks a different set of questions that refuse to read queer African in relation to, or as 'other' to queer studies as theorised in the north, but as studies located in contexts often assumed illegible, or opaque to the outside eye. Carrying on with the conversation, Musila (2019) invites us to think about including African scholarship in its entirety, even if this means sometimes not following paths laid out in Euro-American scholarship. Indeed, current scholarship calls for more focused attention to approaches, methods and contextual influences that serve to illuminate better methods for reading scholarship from the Global South.

In this article, I extend these thoughts by reflecting on what it means to write from the Global South. Specifically, I think of revision as an opportunity for reflecting on how and what we choose to write with the aim of publication. I argue that, while we may sometimes be caught in the race to publish, it is during revision that we slow down, practise slow thinking, and work with others to sharpen ideas that eventually capture the essence of our thinking and our authorial voices. This is certainly true for me in cases where first submissions have tended to be too generic, and not always fully reflective of my own thought patterns, choices and voice. Thus, the larger commentary in the paper is that revision offers opportunity for deeper reflection on what it means to write from the Global South. While the article draws on subjective accounts that may not be like other scholars' experiences, the hope is that moments of reflection can be tied to broader issues that suggest ways forward in thinking about debates around the future of publishing for scholars in the Global South.

Generous scholarship, reflection and dialogue

One theoretical and methodological entry point for this paper is to think about writing through alternative approaches to academic practice. The larger purpose of this suggested approach is to address inherent inequalities that linger in the world of publishing. While normative academic practice in the neoliberal university rewards rapid production of publications, this article locates itself within the much slower paced context of 'generous scholarship' (Martinovic, McGinn, Scott & Obradović-Ratković 2022, 42) to accommodate the contextual differences that mark publishing in the Global South. The idea of an alternative approach is also borne out of a need to have a more accommodative approach to scholarship that considers historical inequalities, vulnerabilities as well as generative contexts with which to write. Starting from the argument that revision is a moment during which feedback can become generative, I show that it can also become a moment of reflection on how methods and approaches unique to the context help to generate new knowledge and practices.

To think of such methods or alternative approaches to academic practice, I turn to 'generous scholarship' and how it encourages a different way of thinking about doing research, a slowing down and holding of space for the academic to work within. Generous scholarship encourages collegiality, reciprocity, generosity and agency and can attract a vibrant re-engagement with academic practice (Martinovic et al. 2022, 42). The authors read this form of scholarship against the 'competitive and individualistic norms in academia' (2022, 42) that they argue can be detrimental to productivity. The idea of generous scholarship is expansive in the way it embraces difference, allows for agentic interventions and creates space for new knowledge. Indeed, Vivienne Bozalek and Nike Romano (2023) are more explicit in their call for this type of scholarship. In the analysis of the review process in critical scholarship, these two scholars call for an alternative practice and approach to scholarly submissions in which they call for slower, more reflective methods of engagement with the text. Generous scholarship is also akin to what I have described elsewhere as the decolonial practice of 'holding space' in academic publishing in Africa (Ligaga 2023, 496). It is a supportive structure that enables interventions within systems of unequal academic practices. It is about acknowledging peculiarities of context and how these in turn, affect how one does critical writing.

Within African studies, generous scholarship is necessary precisely because of the multidisciplinary nature of this area of study. Here, keen attention must be paid to local data, and how that data potentially produces unique theoretical standpoints. Elsewhere Black feminists writing in the United States have made this argument regarding the very specific results of focusing on and paying attention to the details of lived experienced among Black women (Patterson et al. 2016). Bozalek and Romano (2023) argue that when generous scholarship is practised, it can yield positive results for authors, editors, reviewers and readers because it creates opportunity for different parties to enter into dialogue. In the context of author and reviewer, they emphasise the need for detailed feedback as a form of dialogue in order to enter into a state of mutual understanding and learning. One is reminded of Keguro Macharia's consideration of another queer African thinker, Neo Musangi's pondering of the meaning of a word, *tala*, used to describe queer by the Akamba people of Eastern Kenya (Macharia 2016, 184; Musangi 2014, 54). The word *tala* becomes a moment of intrigue because it renders itself opaque within

the normative theorisation of queer, but has deeply embedded meanings in the local context. *Tala*, as Macharia further ponders, demands an unlearning within queer studies, but also invites a conversation to unpack the new relations it points to in terms of geographies and histories.

In much the same way, in the field of studies I work with requires the generosity of others for it to fully become. Karin Barber (1987) has argued over the years that part of African popular culture's uniqueness, is the fact that it is intertwined with the everyday life of its producers and consumers. It is a field that is sometimes 'vague', 'elusive', or 'undefined' and is transdisciplinary in nature but also importantly retains 'a keen pulse on the everyday' (Spencer, Ligaga & Musila 2018, 3). Indeed, we have ventured to describe the field to mean 'the range of cultural productions, platforms, and interactions between consumers and producers - which are often interchangeable - that capture the material, the affective, as inflected and refracted in different texts, contexts and platforms' (Spencer et al. 2018). At the centre of this seemingly big description is the idea that popular culture is a part of the everyday, capturing values and emotions of African people in important ways.

In the years since I began working in this field of study, I have entered into many conversations with different kinds of reviewers, mentors and readers, formally and informally. At the basis of it, feedback that has been most productive has been the one that has functioned the expansive spaces of generous scholarship. This is partly because this has been a continuous moment of learning and unlearning, unburdening oneself of dominant worldviews, and re-engaging older assumptions. African popular culture, as produced in the pulse of the everyday, is expanding in unpredictable ways, and studying it requires pause and remaining open to its many changes and shifts. One way in which this has shaped me is to force myself to reflect about my positionality within the scholarship that I do.

Positioning oneself in scholarship

The moment of being revised is a moment of deep personal conflict. Among many other questions one might have, is the question of whether one's ideas or intentions have been misunderstood. Being revised invokes a rethinking, and 'opens up the practice of writing towards a more-than human, iterative and performative process that unsettles inscribed subject/object binaries between author and text' (Bozalek and Romano 2023, 12). Indeed, if revision is done from a slower, more reflective place, then it introduces what Bozalek and Romano term 'diffractive writing […] a materialization of thinking anew rather than a mirroring of that which is already known'. Writing with reflection, as they argue, discourages regurgitation of what is already known. In that moment, one becomes open to unlearning and re-learning oneself and one's ideals. Much like scholars who advocate for acknowledgement of situated knowledge and the politics of positionality as embedded in how we do research (Simandan 2019), I have considered what my politics are, and what ideological standpoints I enter into my work from. I note this as important because I have struggled to balance the demand for compulsory citation of key names in the academy, mostly from the Global North, with the engagement with less known academics in the Global South. Part of this pull is based on my own positionality and what I wish/how I wish to present my work. I want to argue that revision has offered

me numerous chances to re-think and solidify my position in scholarship in terms of identifying what matters to me, and my ideals. Two big schools of thought influence my work: one is the idea of Africa as central to knowledge production (decolonial thinking); and secondly, the idea of the everyday as a location for generative knowledge. Combined, these two approaches have helped shape my work.

That said, my biggest challenge has always been deciding between doing what I feel I want to project in my work; and paying attention to the global politics of academic publishing. Sometimes this could mean responding to minor issues around clarification, but sometimes it could be something much more demanding. I remember once publishing a paper in which I referred to digital chatter as the source of my analysis. The digital chatter was of course by African digital subjects, whom I insisted on reading as disembodied voices who exist outside of national boundaries of time and space; but whose location could be tracked through online discourse. Methodologically, it mattered to me to have these subjects remain anonymous. However, I was younger, and much more tentative in my writing and presentation. One reviewer thought I had taken a 'shortcut' by not doing the 'real' work of interviewing my subjects, and the least I could do was at least try and name my sources. This was a dilemma for me mostly because I was more interested in the digital discourse than in identifying actual people. However, I also understood I was moving in the terrain of cyber/ethnography and there were rules I was expected to pay attention to. I knew though that naming my sources would have undermined the purpose of my methodological entry point – the emphasis that the unknown contributor was saying something that contributed largely to a bigger discussion, and that this mattered. I eventually figured a way around the dilemma during the revision phase, and offered pseudonyms for the subjects I was studying. Either way, this episode left me thinking about my position as a younger African scholar, and the limited leeway I had to contribute towards a shift in how I could do academic scholarship. More importantly, it gave me one of the many opportunities I would have in my career to think about what I really wanted to say, and why.

Reflecting on that moment now, I see that this was a bigger conversation about how African scholars choose to read their worlds. I want to argue here, that this point of interruption offered me a chance to review the place of African scholarship as contributing to relevant and necessary theoretical and methodological inflections in the academy. By being forced to pause, I had an opportunity to not only think about my own positionality, and my ideological approach to reading Africa, but also to think about what it would look like if my approach would have made sense to the reviewer right away. I can also now speak from a point of knowledge and look back at that moment as one in which I was trying to articulate my position. My thinking in many ways was an act of questioning in which I wondered about my legitimacy as a contributor to knowledge production. My thinking was and continues to reflect on the place of African scholars in the global politics of academic writing. In current debates, my thinking does align with decolonial thinking. Decolonial praxis suggests a decentring of knowledge systems, a re-entry into global discourses of knowledge production from multiple other locations.

A field such as African popular culture exists within decolonial modes of thinking. It is a field that explores contexts in the Global South, and lived experiences and is generative of new scenarios with which to think. While it predates the current trend of decolonial thinking, it embraces the ethos of refocusing attention from centres of knowledge and

power in the west and focusing instead on contextual objects in the postcolonial era. The expansive nature of the field allows for multiple entry points into understanding how objects enter research. Within African popular culture, it might be that the object of study presents as 'strange' or opaque; or one's interpretation of a phenomenon is seen as a possible (mis)use of a theory already shaped elsewhere. When one is revised for some of the above reasons, one's urge to use the opportunity to build/clarify/rearticulate becomes urgent. After all, in global discourse, Africa comes with its own preconceived frameworks, and scholars based on the continent are generally read as data providers as opposed to generators of new ideas (Mano & Milton 2021; Musila 2019). From being revised then, I have learnt to be more assertive in my engagement with my subject, and with my methodological entry point. Revision has not only offered me a chance to think about what I am saying and want to communicate, it has also become a point of reflecting about my place as an African scholar in academia globally.

Emerging cultures and what to do with them

Within the context of generous scholarship, it is possible to think about experimental thinking and writing as having a valid place in doing scholarship. This is a form of writing that relies on instinct and auto/biographical knowledge, and that encourages writers to develop unique voices in presenting that knowledge (Ligaga 2023). Generous scholarship makes room for context specific, as well as temporal nuances of cultures under assessment. As is clear by now, some of the work I do sometimes involves stumbling onto an area of interest. The idea of *stumbling* indicates uncertainty and experimentation. However, within my field, it is a methodological strategy to pull together parts of culture that seemingly do not work or are made up of the chaotic elements of the everyday (de Certeau 1984) and making sense of them. Another element that characterises my work is the idea of newness. Barber (1987) aptly identifies qualifiers of African popular culture as novel, syncretic and ever evolving. What is identified as popular lends itself to being read as new precisely because it is that which is generated from collisions between cultures, and such collisions are constant through time. I work in this field, in which I try to figure out how to read an element of culture that presents as trendy or new. In the age of digital media, the generation of new cultures that require critical study in my field have multiplied. I therefore find myself engaging with new material, and only armed with theoretical tools already in existence. In this section, I want to think about how I have used revision to really try and get to what I want to do with a collection of new data in the course of my work.

When I first started working with digital media and cultures, I encountered several setbacks, including the challenge of addressing disciplinary territorialism: the state of debate on Africa and technology at the time, and a dearth of research on popular culture and digital media. My entry into the conversation was therefore shaky. I remember at a conference; I presented a paper on the possibilities created for cultural explosion online. The paper was a very early mapping of chatter in which I started to identify people I thought were activist voices shaping political discourse in Kenya. This was after a few years of observing and contributing to a Kenyan discussion forum. I had taken an interest in one contributor who came across as a strong political and social commentator, and I was curious to see how I could locate him within the broader argument about online

space as alternative avenue for performing popular culture in Kenya. During question-and-answer time, a senior academic called me an optimist; that the reality was that Africans were burdened by technological and digital divide and while a few elite users had access to digital technology, this was not true for majority of Africans. My dilemma at this point was this: Must we fold ourselves into nothingness because Africa has a burden to carry and therefore must not be read optimistically?

This interjection by the academic did two things: it made me pause and doubt my intervention. It also made me realise that I *was* an optimist because that is what African popular culture studies enabled. I realised, after thinking, pausing and reflecting, that much of African research was encumbered by limiting worldviews; gate-keeping that stopped one's ability to think beyond some frameworks. I was at the time aware of the state of debate on Africans and information and communication technologies, and the parameters with which these issues were treated. Even then, I was drawn to a growing number of online communities of Africans both at home and the diaspora that were producing new and exciting conversations. I acknowledged the negative aspects made possible by digital media and how it shaped the way one could read these emerging cultures. So, for instance, I followed discussions about diaspora in relation to home (Africa) with as much interest as discussions about politics. I was equally fascinated by the ways in which Africans' innovative uses of mobile phones were changing global assumptions about the continent. I was interested in understanding how such online dialogues were shifting identity politics in Kenya and elsewhere, and what was being enabled in a context that was emerging from an authoritarian system of rule. I used the question about the im/possibility of thriving for African digital users, as an invitation to think about the social and cultural significance of digital cultures in Africa. I was interested in understanding the place of mundane practices of nostalgia, dialogue, resourcefulness, play and generative engagement for Africans online. Where could one classify the large diasporic culture that was emerging, and how did this impact our own understandings of Africans and online cultures? While these questions might seem irrelevant now, it is that moment of encounter with the 'strangeness' of Africans and online culture that led me to think about the formation of African subjectivities online, and the generative possibilities of such encounters in defining or sharpening understandings of technology and cultural changes in Africa. Out of these set of questions, I was able to publish work that pushed the boundaries of assumptions, introducing possibility and engagement into my own research. What stayed with me was the fact that as an African scholar, I understood the field I was entering into and how I wanted to make this entrance.

One of the opportunities I had then, was to re-enter the debate on digital culture in Africa from a place of possibility. I was not interested in starting from a place of lack, in which Africa fit neatly into pre-conceived ideas (Yékú 2022). I wanted to weave into the discussion a different angle, one that acknowledged that although Africans did indeed need to catch up to the world in terms of resources, they were also an innovative group of individuals who used what they had at hand in interesting ways. I think here of Simon Gikandi's invitation to think outside of familiar frameworks for reading Africa (2010). As Gikandi asks, what does it mean to write against perceptions of Africa as captured in interventionist scholarship? What does it mean to write about Africa within the scope of possibility? Much of the work in popular culture in Africa involves animating a language of engagement with Africa's ordinary everyday life, outside of stereotypical

avenues of the postcolonial condition (Mbembe 2001). To write about the everyday in Africa via popular culture is to celebrate spaces of and for possible agency, where despite violent conditions of existence, Africans continue to thrive. Indeed, to reference Gikandi further, it should be possible to think about African lives as 'imaginative and redemptive' (2010, xii). What does it mean to read beyond a 'language of crisis and failure' and to reimagine African lives beyond existing structures and institutions of meaning? (Gikandi 2010). Gikandi's proposition is to dare ourselves to think outside of the cyclical trap of analysis caught as it were, in the idea of perpetual crisis. If one thinks in this way, one begins to imagine the entry point of popular culture studies in Africa that emphasise other dynamics of African social lives beyond a contained focus on crisis.

My interjection then and now, is that African everyday cultures have not always been meaningfully considered in positive light. Reading Africans alongside conversations of agency or as Gikandi terms it, afro-optimism, is something that is not always latched onto by scholars. When my idea was rejected, I decided to put in more thought into the subject, because I was convinced I had a point to make. I want to argue, gatekeeping can be debilitating to the African scholar trying to break ground using ideas generated from experience and from data. Data can surprise, yet, one way in which status quo is maintained is through the repetition of methodologies and theoretical approaches that force the work to remain contained in well-rehashed frameworks or approaches. Scholars of popular cultures in Africa show and continue to show why it is important to create room for novelty born out of collisions of culture in modernity.

Looking back, I think it was wonderful that I had editors who were able to accommodate my tentative and half-finished thoughts on what I wanted to say. Indeed, much of my research at the time was not backed by the scholarship in the field. The body of work on cyber-ethnography and netnography did not align with my interests. Many of them were on Global North politics. Others were bound by disciplinary demands, with many of them adopting arguments already forged in 'offline' life, and superimposing these online. To date, the debate on whether online and offline lives differ, continues. Many scholars prefer a merging of these two contexts. In this way, it is possible to theorise continuities of social and political events better. While such concerns matter, it was equally pertinent to pay attention to what the online spaces were making possible. James Yékú's latest publication is just one example of where the debate is at (2022). Creative engagement with academic research can emerge as too elusive and unscientific. However, this is also where new ideas are generated. Here, I argue that fields such as African popular culture enable such generative productions, and make it possible to explore that which appears strange or difficult to engage. In the end, this becomes an act of repositioning Africa in global discourse.

Writing with data (or how to write about the 'obvious')

The work that I do follows methodologies devised by scholars of popular cultures. Following de Certeau, it is important to understand how creative uses of culture offer opportunity to generate new ideas precisely because of their unpredictability (1984). In this section I want to ponder on what it has meant to work with the data that I research and how negotiating between working with data and working with complex theory

has been a product of revision. I wrote a book on women in popular culture, and in the course of my work, I learnt what it meant to write 'with' data. Writing with data means allowing the data to direct your theoretical entry point, as opposed to using pre-existing and often complex theory to unpack meanings generated from data. As already mentioned, I work with data that mediates familiar, ordinary issues that would ordinarily be dismissed as 'obvious' and banal. Yet, I am intrigued by what de Certeau terms 'clandestine forms' that are creatively reproduced in the realm of the everyday (1984, xiv-xv). I look at the products of popular culture as enabling a mapping of representations and patterns of culture in order to make them visible for study. In much of my work, I make such mappings using data in order to create a framework for critical understanding. Using theory generated elsewhere can overwhelm the data and make it difficult to access meaning. In my research journey, through multiple corrections and revisions, I have learnt to allow data to direct my research.

I first ventured into popular culture through radio drama. I was interested in engaging the genre, as well as the systems and institutions that had sustained it in Kenya. This involved working in diverse fields like politics, history and literature, as well as media and cultural studies. The radio plays themselves presented as morality narratives of romance, marriage and kinship. They had fairly straightforward storylines. For instance, one radio play titled *Infertility* (2004) is a play with two main characters, Mark and Tracey, who are trying to conceive but are unable to. The storyline is about the discussions between them, and the erroneous assumption that Tracey is the reason for their fertility issues. Eventually, as Mark is contemplating sending Tracey away (basically divorcing her), a health practitioner intervenes and it is discovered that in fact, Mark's low sperm count is the reason the two are unable to conceive. The dialogue in the play is in English but with local inflections both in enunciation, as well as in the inclusion of Kiswahili and other local languages. It is clear the play wants to surface issues that stigmatise women in conversations about fertility. It explores issues of blame and shame (here, referring to an abortion Tracey had had as a younger woman) as well as some common cultural alternatives (in which the man is often encouraged to marry another woman; consulting a local medicine man) as avenues that map familiar responses to fertility issues. Eventually 'reason' prevails when Mark agrees to see a medical specialist. This radio play is part of an institutional agenda to 'educate' listeners by playing out solutions to issues that are pertinent to society. Reading this play and others like it, can be tricky. For starters, what does one do with the straightforward style of the play? Stylistically, the dialogue, plot and characterisation lack complexity. They are didactic pieces meant to deliver a message. My research had to follow the play (as opposed to arriving into my work with ready-made ideas about how radio drama worked). I followed the crumbs offered within the play in terms of cultural references, assumptions and the idea that the radio plays functioned as symbolic of the multiple ways in which Kenyan society responded stereotypically to issues of fertility. I had to take seriously how the audio aspects worked to activate meaning in the plays, from accents, to sound effects to music. I had to contextualise the plays, and understand how they came to occupy their place in Kenyan socio-political histories. I had to pay attention because I needed to understand what to do with plays that dramatised familiar everyday themes. I was entering into this world of radio drama armed with training in postcolonial theory, and I found myself struggling when my work demanded that I speak to the radio plays and what they were doing outside of

the large theoretical arguments I was holding on to. In this case, the call for correction was both internal (self-correction) as well as external (supervisor and editor feedback). Feedback was interrupted by already formed ideas about how to read the world, and allowed for a generative reading of the radio plays. I had to learn, through being corrected, to return to this data, examine it, and reimagine a different approach to reading them. While I did eventually return to the big theoretical ideas, the framing of my work within everyday culture taught me to approach writing in a way that was more accessible.

Writing with data also becomes an opportunity to engage with the everyday or the 'obvious'. I had to answer the question 'so what' when I wrote on forced marriages in Kenya or extramarital affairs as dramatised in the radio plays I studied. These plays deal with issues considered familiar and perhaps 'obvious'. There are people in other fields, for instance public health, who have done research and written extensively on issues of abortion and fertility. What was the new thing that I was bringing to the table? It took me a while, and a lot of reflective time to realise that the question was never about the content as much as it was about context. In the context in which I work, much of what I study makes sense, and that is how I answer the 'so what?' question. The context presents clues that helps one to make broader theoretical arguments. The data draws on this context in immersive ways, and as a researcher, I have had to constantly integrate these elements.

Writing with data (using data to generate theory) can present a challenge when one works within specific disciplinary demands. It means asking the data to set the pace and clear the way for thinking, as opposed to following the well beaten path of mastering dominant western scholarship (which generates its own theoretical positions). To allow correction is also to allow one's data to reposition/ refocus the research questions. The research object in the field of African popular culture demands to be seen as it is; defying heavy pre-theorisation, but rather, inviting one to use it to uncover alternative terrains of knowledge making. In many ways, the idea of thinking with data links to the decolonial idea of theorising from one's location as earlier discussed. How I have come to understand theory is that the development of theory (which then travels as abstract) starts from a specific location, where observations of specific environments and contexts lead to particular results, all of which are eventually transformed into universalist modes of thinking. When we begin to think from the place of our experience, our positionality, we can build these ideas into theories that make sense for unpacking the data we work with. Unfortunately, this leeway (to allow data to generate theories that can then travel) is not always possible for African scholarship. As such, the act of thinking from one's location is premised on a theory built somewhere, as though one's own experiences cannot amount to new knowledge. Yet, as we are learning from the multitude of works on post-colonialism and decoloniality, there are other locations from which to think, that stand in contradiction to hegemonic bodies of knowledge. This significant point is one of the ways that I have found myself with, against possible erasure.

Doubt as pause

I have never submitted a paper for review and thought it was great. In fact, on many occasions, I have expected it would be returned to me with at best, requests for revision, and at worst, rejection. I have come to rely on this process to get my ideas published. This

does not mean I am immune to the feelings of rejection and dejection when asked to revise. However, part of the reason I 'write with' corrections is to align with an editor's expectation. A larger part of my process is born out of feelings of doubt. Doubt here, is both a marker of vulnerability as well as a way of legitimately seeking space to think. Doubt is a tool to work with, an acknowledgement that one is not always at one's best when working on publications. It can create space for reflection and can therefore be generative. Doubt makes it possible for me to identify pitfalls and to address them properly before my work goes out to the public. In many cases, doubt becomes a space for seeking and offering clarity on unfamiliar contexts in which particular ideas are born. I was once asked by a reviewer to clarify the use of a phrase that I had assumed had universal translatability. I was writing about radio drama in Kenya, which I argued adopted a *moral narrative* mode in order to mediate its educational/ instructional messages. The role of the genre was important in the context in which the plays were produced. Specifically, I referred to the typification of women in radio drama; and critiquing the intentional ways in which these women were contained within the narrative of the plays. I remember the query, because to my mind, I was writing about something that was universal. I googled the phrase, searching for common usage – moral narrative (as opposed to the morality play, which is what the reviewer wanted me to adopt). Common. I wondered what it would mean to go with the phrase that I had become attached to, and to proceed as though in Kenya, we spoke of 'moral narratives' and not morality plays. I really just needed to use the idea of the moral narrative as a tool for making sense of the plays I was reading that seemed to all operate in particular ways. I had a moment of doubt because I did in fact wonder about my own competency in the English language. On hindsight, perhaps I could have chosen a different phrase, and I do not think it would have mattered that much. My point though is the correction gave me pause. I questioned myself and the way I used the English language. I doubted myself, and wondered if slippages of my limited knowledge of particular fields were once again glaring.

As an African scholar, I come into the field of publishing with a degree of vulnerability. This vulnerability is both dangerous and productive. Dangerous, because it can cause one to hold back, to self-flagellate, and to sometimes give up. Even then, doubt forces one to stop working, to stop moving and to check one's quality of work. The moment of doubt can present as a rejection, but it is also, at least for me, an important avenue for reflection. When working on a major project, I have found myself asking many questions after receiving feedback. Was I not being clear? Did they understand what I wanted to communicate? Would they find it okay? This doubt is persistent, whether at conferences, other public spaces, or after publication. A single comment can cut into one's thesis, causing panic, pause, sometimes leading to a withdrawal of one's work.

However, I want to insist that when working with critically astute yet understanding editors, doubt can be generative. Doubt can give pause, and enable one to rethink one's argument. It is also a time to reflect on what is written, or said. At a seminar presentation, I was once dismissed because I had mis-represented the women subjects I was analysing, in online spaces. I had chosen to use visual representation to speak about these women who were hyper-visible, rebellious and a challenge to dominant representations of women. I was so determined to present these digital subjects as empowered, that I forgot to address the negative work that the visual was doing. Apparently, according to one respondent, I was reproducing violence. I had no time to engage and let this

person know that the overlook was unintentional. I agonised over this issue when writing later projects for publication. In the case of writing my book on women in popular culture, were it not for the guidance and intervention of my manuscript development editor, I probably would have given up on writing about these women whose activities online I found endlessly generative. That moment of doubt/ self-doubt gave me pause, and made me doubt my methodological approaches to online subjectivities. The 'what if' question still hangs over me, guiding me towards more ethical practices of writing.

Reflective writing and building communities of support

My last reflection has to do with how we think about the communities that make it possible for us to publish. During revision, one is forced to relate with others, whether with editors, mentors or reviewers. This is a period when one becomes aware of what is made possible in academic writing and who makes it possible. This has to do with the kinds of communities of support that exist in academic research. What kinds of communities exist to support the academic journey and how do they create safe spaces for thinking and reflecting and engaging with feedback? As an African academic, I have found communities of support to be vital for my growth, because often, they offer spaces to air one's views, doubts, ideas, and work even as one engages in processes of rewriting one's work. For some, these are communities that offer marginalised members of the academic community safe spaces to reflect, talk about their difficulties in their publication journeys and create healthy spaces for feedback (Martinez et al. 2015). In my growth as an academic, I have depended on these spaces for support. The communities I choose to be a part of, offer me breathing room, safety and space to make mistakes. I can think freely when I am together with my writing group; benefitting from tangible and intangible aspects of these communities. These communities hold space for me, and provide me with time to think and generate ideas. In these spaces, I can be wrong, and I can be corrected, and it will be for much better quality work, more honest and more engaging. While writing my book, I depended on these communities to hold space for me. I was struggling with balancing work and mothering. I knew that on my own, my book would never have been written. Working two full-time jobs (mothering being a full-time job) was exhausting, and I would have given up if not for the community of academics I worked with, who read bits of my work and gave wonderful feedback, and who genuinely willed me to succeed. I also had the support of a manuscript development editor, as I was part of a postdoctoral project that wanted me to produce a successful piece of work. My development editor's patient engagement with my work, in which she provided clear feedback, made work that much easier.

In addition to the physical communities, I found that when working with particular authors' research, I could identify people with whom I could think. For lack of a better term, I refer to these people as conceptual buddies (editors, scholars) with whom one can work. Thinking with others (as opposed to quoting X because they said it first) is a form of community formation in the context of correction and revision. Macharia (2016) has argued that thinking with academics who influence one's worldview and approach to scholarship is a powerful way into academic work. My conceptual buddies are scholars whose work hold space during moments of self-doubt or when facing multiple vulnerabilities because of uncertainty of a particular subject. To use an

example, I learnt from Audre Lorde and bell hooks, that writing about race and memory does not have to be linear, and that imagination is a valid form of rememorying. In contexts of absence and erasure, there are alternative possibilities from where to think. In a way, these scholars allow me to be less rigid in my approach to doing scholarship. They both variously offered profound ideas around intersectionality and Black lives, but did so in accessible ways. I feel a kinship with these scholars because it is as though I get permission to just be, when I am reading them. This aspect is true to much of feminist writing that integrates reflexivity as a method of researching.

In much of my writing, I have worked with the conviction that someone somewhere will want to listen. It is necessary to emphasise this point, especially because those of us who write on our locations in the Global South, run the risk of being rejected for ideas or for style or both. We seek to be published in journals that we imagine as home. Such journals are the kind that can expand, and accommodate a different way of thinking and doing research. We look for journals that publish African research.

Conclusion

This article is a reflective piece on the writing process through revision. To think of revision as productive means to recognise the details that this process of entails. I began by locating the article within a conceptual context in which questions about epistemology and the Global South are outlined. I then engaged the idea of generous scholarship as a necessary theoretical and methodological tool within which to enter discussions about what it means to publish from the location of the Global South. Through these two related standpoints, I then presented different autobiographic experiences to think with/ introduce moments of engagement around what revision has enabled. Whether this is around thinking critically of one's positionality; or the development of methods for studying context specific research; or even to think about writing with data as experimental and hence open to new challenges, this article is meant to invite thinking with/ and around specific insights borne out of revision. I argue that this level of reflection is not possible outside of generous scholarship and what is made possible.

Disclosure statement

No conflict of interest was declared by the author.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers who encouraged me to write more productively about the ideas in this article. I am also grateful to all the editors for patience and encouragement.

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