LARGER THAN LIFE? DECOLONISING HUMAN SECURITY STUDIES THROUGH FEMINIST POSTHUMANISM

Heidi Hudson
Faculty of Humanities
University of the Free State, Bloemfontein

Abstract

Binary thinking is one of the features of coloniality, manifesting in a zero-sum game between 'our' and 'their' security. The development of human security as an antidote has, however, been marked by a continuation of such divisions in a much subtler way. This state of affairs is exacerbated by the fact that concepts held up as possible solutions, such as the gendering of human security or the broader tool of decolonisation, are often also trapped in unimaginative oppositional thinking which runs the risk of recolonising knowledge and harming those who are supposed to be secured. The focus in this article is therefore on the coloniality of human security scholarship and practices and how this concept can be reinvigorated through a feminist 'post'-humanist lens. I argue that a feminist posthuman security approach that decentres the human (by going beyond asking for the inclusion of women only) and underscores agentic relations between (all) humans, the natural environment, technology and objects more adequately captures the entangled nature of human security practices, especially in the postcolony. The approach draws on a blend of six conceptual pillars, namely a poststructuralist understanding of agency as the product of intra-action rather than interaction; feminist critiques of equating what is male and what is human; the emphasis on intersections between race and gender in feminist postcolonial theory; the importance of situated knowledge; the agency of matter and objects in the construction of security and/or insecurity; and an acknowledgement of indigenous Africa-centred knowledge forms. I conclude that this kind of posthuman security frame, which merges feminist posthumanism and new materialist posthumanism, not only allows a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the human condition

but also offers a foundation for developing a decolonised human security research agenda.

1. Introduction

If orange is the new black; then decolonisation is the new normal. The so-called 'decolonial turn' in recent years started with the 2015 spectacle of the #Rhodes Must Fall campaign in South Africa and the subsequent #Fees must Fall movement (see Fairbanks 2015). With student protests came epistemic debates around representation, inclusion and equality in the teaching, research and institutional practices of universities. These developments brought to the surface latent and longstanding contestations over knowledge and power, particularly in Africa. In short, decolonisation has become big business.

Yet, spectacular scenes of burning libraries may have reinvigorated peda-gogies, but they do not automatically translate into decolonised content (Jansen 2016). And many years of critique (for example, Ngũgĩ 1989) have brought little change, reminding us that the need to recognise, reassert and reaffirm the cen-trality of marginalised individuals and communities and what matters to them, remains as pressing as ever. In this context, a project on decolonising the human-ities therefore has to critically engage with meaning-making practices, as these underpin the most fundamental aspects of being human. It therefore helps to re-member that the goal of extending human understanding through "the words, ideas, narratives and the art and artefacts that help us make sense of our lives and the world we live in" (Collini 2012: 85) already is (or should be) a fundamentally decolonising act. In this regard *The Consensus Study on the State of the Humanities in South Africa* (Academy of Science of South Africa 2011) emphasises the need for an Africa-wide postcolonial focus and an engagement with the meanings of the past and how these are entangled with meanings of the present and the future, in particular at the institutional level. How we have created our postcolonial worlds is therefore intrinsically tied to how we are also created by these worlds.

A critical engagement with the question, 'who counts as human' (or what are the limits of 'the human'), therefore stands at the centre of the decolonisation project. And beyond the moral charge to address colonial epistemic and empirical injustices, decolonisation also needs to reflect an understanding that power in-equalities intersect. Race appears to have dominated (Frankenburg 1993; Steyn 2001) as a unit of analysis or entry point through which social and epistemic in-justice is viewed. By extension, I therefore contend in this article that we need a wider lens that takes account of multiple overlapping identities, such as gender, race, sexuality, age and so forth.

More specifically, the focus in this article is on the coloniality of human security scholarship and practices and how this concept can be reinvigorated through a feminist 'post'-humanist lens. 'Human' security as a concept carries the semblances of inclusivity, but empirical evidence testifies to the opposite. Invoking a common and undifferentiated humanity hides very specific injustices on the ground, particularly for those on the fringes (Hudson 2005). Similarly, to presume that international security is only about securing human lives and bodies negates the many interconnected processes and technologies that implicate non-human entities in the construction or destruction of security. A feminist posthuman security approach therefore goes beyond just asking for the inclusion of women, and underscores agentic relations between (all) humans, the natural environment, technology and objects. My contention is that a posthuman future which decentres the human and acknowledges the political agency of both human and non-human actants more adequately captures the entangled nature of human security practices, especially in the postcolony with its peculiar mix of oppressions and resistances. A (postcolonial) feminist view-finder for security is further necessary to maintain scepticism towards the new alliance between the human and non-human. A so-called 'posthuman security assemblage' that includes humans and objects is never apolitical nor does it imply a level playing field. In fact, networks of human and nonhuman agents "profoundly restructure the processes of sexualization, racialization and naturalization as pillars of the bio-political governmentality" (Braidotti 2013: 98).

It follows that for the purposes of this research, the contours of coloniality of all the key building blocks, namely decolonisation, security, human security and gender need to be drawn. In the first three sections of the article I therefore offer critiques of these concepts, showing how their assumptions exclude and preclude alternative imaginings through binary thinking and/or conflations. I then contextualise these critiques by looking at how feminists in the global North (through the field of 'Feminist Security Studies') and postcolonial African feminist scholars (through the lens of nationalisms) have operationalised these concepts. Drawing on these lacunae and practical manifestations, I devote the last part of the article to the exposition of an alternative strategy/frame for posthuman security consisting of six conceptual elements drawn from the African, postcolonial context as well as feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial theory. I conclude that a posthuman security frame, which merges feminist posthumanism and new materialist posthumanism, allows a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the human condition. It also offers a foundation for developing a decolonised human security research agenda.

2.   From hype and recolonising decolonisation to alternative (entangled) imaginings

Decolonisation runs the risk of recolonisation, mainly because the concept is premised on dichotomous thinking of the coloniser versus the colonised. It risks becoming an empty signifier, when the term is bandied about without serious reflection on the power of language and the possibility of an alternative vocabulary (Mbembe 2014). The prefix 'de' does not tell us much about the alternative, only that it suggests the removal of some germ or pollutant. To suggest that one can remove a certain element from the curriculum, discourse or practice and then expect it to be 'fixed' is deeply misleading. A decolonised curriculum that teaches students just about themselves is just as narcissistic as the colonial higher education project and potentially just as violent in an epistemological sense. Wahbie Long (2016) describes the term as something that "imprisons us within a colonial imaginary. Unable to think beyond the binaries of coloniser and colonized, white and black, stripped of the potential for audacious acts of imagination". It is one thing to rail against colonial epistemology and global coloniality, but the real challenge is to actually 'do' decolonisation — decolonising the university as an institution and/or its individual parts, such as the curriculum.

Jonathan Jansen (2017: 156) contends that while there is no singular or fixed meaning of the term decolonisation, the best we can do is to try and make sense of decolonisation within the contexts in which the word is used. Approaches to decolonisation are wide-ranging, offering no clear-cut manual for the actual act of decolonising. Decolonisation as an additive approach where Africa or Ubuntu is added to the debate may sound progressive but does little to challenge prevailing inequalities. Decolonisation as the decentring of European knowledge, where Europe is replaced with Africa at the centre of the curriculum, but where the focus is on Africa in relation to Europe is a soft version of africanisation. Decolonisation as the africanisation of knowledge represents the other side of the coin. This hard variant reclaims African agency and identity and seeks to displace all colonial or Western knowledge (Jansen 2017: 158-161). However, since these approaches fail to transcend dichotomous thinking and the traps of essentialism, I look towards other approaches that view decolonisation as critical engagement with all settled knowledge — any kind of knowledge, asking whose knowledge is being privileged? A key question in this regard is to ask, what work the disciplines do to reinforce unequal power relations (Jansen 2017: 161-163)? See for instance debates in International Relations on critical pedagogies and student resistance (Odysseos and Pal 2018; Vitalis 2015). A logical extension of this is to view decolonisation as encounters with entangled knowledges. Knowledge is not separ-

ated into neat binaries of 'our' and 'their' knowledge but instead becomes intertwined in everyday life in complex ways. This stance dovetails with the fact that my proposed posthuman security approach is also drawn from a broad range of interconnected positions, such as feminist and 'new' materialist posthumanisms.

3.   The limits of (human) security

The evolution of broader notions of security (defined away from narrow state security) to make people the referent of security and include political, social, economic and environmental dimensions is well documented (Booth 1997; Buzan 1991). In theory the two pillars of protection ('freedom from fear') and empowerment ('freedom from want') compel one to view security "in terms of the real-life, everyday experiences of human beings and their complex social and economic relations as these are embedded within global structures" (Thomas 2002). But the broadness of the security agenda (and the concomitant risk of securitisation) as well as the problems of operationalisation of such a vaguely formulated normative framework (see Paris 2001) have loomed large, risking a dilution of the concept's emancipatory power. This became particularly evident in the way that the amorphous and unclear political nature of the concept facilitated neoliberal players' legitimisation for intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nik Hynek and David Chandler (2011) also draw attention to the fact that research on human security lacks theoretical richness, seemingly unable to liberate itself from the constraints of the policy-making discourses and their concomitant analytical categories.

Furthermore, the concept for all its radical potential acts very much like Western International Relations theories which render class-based, cultural, racial and gender differences invisible. It has become trapped in a binary logic of state *versus* people-centred human security, with the consequence that analyses of power remain focused on the needs of the human with little attention to alternative notions of life and the relationship of humans to these broader planetary life forms (Hynek and Chandler 2011). The need for a radical revisit of how human security should be approached to achieve sustainable and inclusive peace has therefore developed out of a sense that international security is not (and never has been) only a matter of securing human lives and bodies. Diverse non-human beings are implicated in the conditions of (in)security. In this conceptualisation security is no longer the static state-centric version pitted against people-centred alternatives and should account for the complex, dynamic, entangled nature of threats while being "responsive to the nature and dynamics of vibrant, diverse systems — human, organic, material, technological — across time and space" (Mitchell 2016).

In addition, feminist dissatisfaction with the concepts of 'security' and 'human security' has grown out of a sense of exclusion of 'other' humans and the fact that it tends to equate being human with being male. With regard to peace and security issues in Africa, the fields of International Relations, Critical Security Studies, Peace Studies and Human Security Studies have all been preoccupied with a rather narrow, gender-neutral and literal understanding of the human. The field tends to collapse multiple identities under the banner of the human, thereby upholding the male norm and risking inattention to the needs of marginalised groups such as women (Hudson 2005: 157). In contrast, a gender-sensitive concept of human security seeks to link women's everyday experiences with the experiences of other people as well as broader regional and global political processes and structures.

This focus therefore leads to a number of key questions, namely (1) who counts as human and what does it mean to be human in Africa? (2) What does security mean in worlds where different kinds of beings (humans, other organisms, machines and hybrids of these) intersect and are co-constituted? (3) What happens when the 'posthuman' is brought into conversation with 'security'? For instance, as Audra Mitchell (2016) asks, "does embracing a more-than-human or post-human ontology mean giving up on notions of security as stability, sustainability or resilience?" (4) Similar to the charge against the broad scope of human security, are we not reinforcing the act of securitising if we extend security even further towards the non-human? (5) Lastly, how does one decolonise security as a concept and practice while keeping the concept as the primary focus? Or does it imply finding a new vocabulary altogether?

4. The limits of gender constructions

In this section I explore the coloniality invoked through gender as a construct, by first explaining the problems generated by a liberal gender construct that treats gender and sex as synonyms. In the second instance I explore responses from African feminist scholars, who argue that gender is a Western construct, devoid of any contextualised grounding.

Although feminist scholarship has been devoted to challenging the age-old Cartesian struggle to overcome binary constructions such as rational Man-natural Woman, gender-sex, perpetrator-victim, and private-public (Pateman 2013), gender has to some extent also become coloured. Using gender as a variable (noun) or descriptor of an empirical identity category (Scott 1986) entrenches coloniality, because it facilitates the posing of questions such as "where are the women?", effectively promoting a conceptual conflation of sex/women and gender. Such slip-

pages between biological differences of men and women and the social construction of masculinities and femininities negatively impact on peace and security work. Laura Shepherd points out that, when gender acts as a proxy for women under the guise of progressiveness, the real needs of women are negated and attention remains squarely fixed on men (Shepherd 2017: 152). The discursive association of gender with women further confirms women's lack of agency and subservient position in relation to men, which in turn, may impact materially on the amount of resources allocated to women's projects. In human security terms, a liberal-feminist approach therefore also feeds on the assumption that gender inequality inhibits development and potentially triggers conflict. While violence against women, for instance, is understood to be a pervasive form of insecurity with far-reaching socio-developmental implications, violence against women is often treated as a synonym for all forms of gender and sexual-based violence. This, in turn, leads to an automatic but erroneous assumption that protection against violence would lead to women's empowerment (Hudson 2015: 47).

Both conflationary and binary thinking therefore originate from the same source, namely a lack of appreciation of complexity and entanglement. To counter this state of affairs, gender as a verb (doing gender) or analytical category exposes relations of power (Scott 1986) and promotes insight into the fact that social practices are gendered because they rely on the logics of gender. The way in which we assign gendered characteristics to objects as well as the associations we make between objects and subjects determine the extent to which we see our social realities as gendered (Hudson 2016: 3).

As mentioned above, there is also a particular view that regards gender and patriarchy as Eurocentric constructions which misrepresent African women's realities, thereby taking issue with the bifurcating consequences inherent in rational Western thinking. Several African-feminist scholars have contributed to this constructionist debate — Oyewùmí (1997) on Yoruba culture and Amadiume (1987; 1997) on Igbo culture in Nigeria. These authors challenge the universal acceptance of 'gender' as the only tool of analysis in a social context where gender should be studied in relation to imperialism, colonialism, nationalism and other forms of global and local stratifications. They maintain that the Western binary logic is alien to many African cultures. Oyèrónké Oyewùmí (1997: 256-259) challenges the Western binary construction of two biologic categories and contends that gender was not an organising principle in pre-colonial Yoruba society. It was a colonial construction used by male colonisers to determine policy. The emergence of gender and its privileging over seniority in that context was the result of the need by scholars of Yoruba studies to capture Yoruba life into the written discourse of English, a language of the hegemon that came imbued with all the trappings of

the Western dualism of body and mind, namely omnipresence of gender, male norms and female exception (Steady 2007: 140-141).

Looking at the Igbo context, Ifi Amadiume (1987: 15) argues that in pre-colonial society, structures of power did not rely on fixed sex and gender meanings and rigidly masculinised or feminised roles:

> [t]he flexibility of Igbo gender construction meant that gender was separate from biological sex. Daughters could become sons and consequently male. Daughters and women in general could be husbands to wives and consequently males in relation to their wives, etc. … An insight into this remarkable gender system is crucial to the understanding and appreciation of the political status women had in traditional Igbo societies and the political choices open to them.

The flexible gender system was further facilitated by language. In Igbo grammar a neuter particle is used in Igbo subject or object pronouns. In speech and writing no gender distinction is made in reference to males and females (Amadiume 1987: 17). The third person singular, O, denotes both male and female, as opposed to 'he' or 'she' in English (Amadiume 1987: 89). This linguistic system facilitates the conceptualisation of certain social roles as separate from sex and gender, making it possible for either sex to step into that role — for example, male daughters or female husbands where women in both cases acted as head of the family (Amadiume 1987: 90). It did not mean that relations were necessarily harmonious — competition for those positions did not go away (Amadiume 1987: 90). It also did not mean that male daughters or female husbands had to become 'manlike' (Amadiume 1987: 186). Evidence of 'third genders', agendered and trans-gendered entities and alternative genders in the non-Western world, African women marriage, and the ambiguity of the gender of some deities testifies to the fluidity of sexuality and challenges the dichotomous Western model (Steady 2007: 140; Oyewùmí 2005: 12).

The examples cited from the Nigerian context are not without criticism, which relate mainly to the charge that these scholars reify difference; do not pay enough attention to the power dynamics of the interaction between gender and age; neglecting the fact that motherhood on its own cannot be the only marker of women's agency; and that it is problematic to generalise from one culture to broader Africa because the absence of biologically-based gender markers in a language does not mean that gender structures are non-existent (Ampofo, Beoku-Betts and Osirim 2008: 330-331). However, I present them here to underline the marginalising effects of ahistorical binary constructions in the postcolony and how these effects manifest in the erection of 'disciplinary' fields and borders.

5.   Feminist security studies and the politics of knowledge

Despite a growing interest in postcolonial-feminist approaches and their security implications (for example, Bora 2010; Chisholm 2014), mainstream feminist International Relations in the global North has still "not given serious attention to the relations between their own geopolitical constitution and other feminisms who have not fallen in step with the universal claims about women and gender" (Aga-thangelou and Turcotte 2010). When Laura Sjoberg (2015: 409) coined the term 'Feminist Security Studies' in order to convince mainstream scholars of Security Studies that "feminist work matters to their research", the intention was one of inclusion rather than exclusion. The unintended consequence of this move was that it had to contend with its label as a Western construct that adopted a some-what narrow security lens. It therefore neglected to a large extent the interrelated nature of militarism, political economy and the environment — issues which speak more directly to the security concerns of people in the global South (Sjo-berg 2015: 409-410). Laura Shepherd (2013: 438) in her response to the 2011 *Politics & Gender* Critical Perspectives section on 'The State of Feminist Security Studies', points to the United States (US) dominance of the field and warns against intellectual myopia. Parashar (2013: 440) similarly challenges the parochial-ity of the normative assumption that "there is something called 'Feminist Security Studies' that is located in the US and that one can choose to adopt that nomen-clature, although there is still little feminist theoretical engagement with 'security' as a concept and its political, social, and cultural performance in a variety of loca-tions" (cited in Hudson 2018: 135-136).

A survey of trends in African gender research related to human security in English-speaking sub-Saharan Africa further confirms the fact that Feminist Security Studies is a global North construction and that African gender and secur-ity research does not resemble Feminist Security Studies. In contrast to the practice of setting up feminist security camps (as illustrated above), in Africa, for example, solidarity around struggles related to decolonisation and development has helped to frame so-called 'fields' much more loosely around 'gender and development' or 'gender and security'. Most of the gender and security scholars on the continent do not self-identify as being part of feminist International Relations or Feminist Security Studies. Over the years, two broad strands have emerged — one inspired by liberal notions of the importance of gender equality for women's security (Heinecken and Van der Waag-Cowling 2009), emphasising inclusion rather than root causes. The other strand is less explicitly focused on (human) security. This body of research to a large extent adopts progressive postcolonial research agendas

to inform studies of subjectivities and everyday experiences as these relate to governance, human rights or sexualities (Ampofo et al 2004; Lewis 2004; Tamale 2011). In terms of feminist human security concerns, African feminists have highlighted the complex relationship between the violence of the postcolonial state, hetero-patriarchal capitalist and gendered militarist processes and how women negotiate their lives materially and discursively through both (Mama and Okazawa-Rey 2012: 97; Lewis 2013; Hudson 2018), as well as theorised women's complex overlapping roles during conflict (Turshen and Twangiramariya 1998; Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen 2001).

In the preceding sections I showed how concepts such as human security and gender as well as some of their respective disciplinary fields are constrained by colonising assumptions and practices. In the next section I turn my attention to possible strategies for overcoming these colonial straightjackets and explain the assumptions underpinning an emerging feminist posthuman security approach as a means to decolonise human security.

6. Towards a posthuman feminist security approach

Much of the thinking on posthuman security emerges from the literature on new materialisms within Critical Security Studies (Connolly 2011; Cudworth and Hobden 2015, 2017; Coole and Frost 2010). This new body of research maintains that all matter (human and nonhuman) matters. Things that we normally consider to be lifeless are construed to have agentic potential, for example in terms of having an ability to provoke human thought and action, structure violence and produce disruption (Mitchell 2016). Applied to the context of postconflict reconstruction and stabilisation efforts in African states, the objectives of such a 'new materialist' agenda include examining the matter of objects when they are used as tools of governance (to control people) and their dehumanising effects;[1)] representations of objects in terms of their distancing effects, for example, what borders, fences and walls mean in terms of citizenship; and (3) how such evidence serves to theorise the role of objects and their agentic potential.

However, given the current hype about new materialisms it is often forgotten that Feminist IR (Tickner 1992, 1997; Hoogensen and Rottem 2004; Hudson 2005; Marhia 2013) has a long history of contributions to the development of security notions that challenge the meaning of 'the human'. In this sense, feminist IR and postcolonial theories can therefore also be termed 'posthuman', for their challenge to a narrow and homogenising depiction of the human. In the Humanitas project the notion of human 'nature' meant that one was not born

human, but that one had to become human — through the study of liberal arts and nurturing sympathy for others. This process of 'becoming' human, however, became eclipsed by 'othering' practices when the so-called 'barbarians' came to be identifiable as female, black, working class, homosexual (among others); and had to be studied to determine whether they were human or not (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017).

The approach outlined below draws on a blend of six conceptual pillars, namely a poststructuralist understanding of agency as the product of intra-action rather than interaction; feminist critiques of equating what is male and what is human; the emphasis on intersections between race and gender in feminist post-colonial theory; the importance of situated knowledge; the agency of matter and objects in the construction of security and/or insecurity; and an acknowledge-ment of indigenous Africa-centred knowledge forms in the making of security.

The first pillar has to do with an expanded conceptualisation of agency, namely as 'intra-active agency' that extends agency to nonhuman objects through a relational process. This understanding is informed by the work of Karen Barad (2007) — a feminist quantum physicist — on agential realism. Barad's work seeks to develop a bridge between materialisms and discursivity when she situates her theory within feminist, postcolonial and poststructuralist debates. She focuses on process and relations to overcome binaries and boundaries. The theoretical inno-vation rests in the issue of intra-action as opposed to interaction. Whereas inter-action presumes the separate and prior existence of independent entities which then inter-act, intra-action does not assume pre-existing agencies. Simply put, things do not exist before or precede their relations. For Barad the main question is, which specific material practices matter, how they come to matter and for whom in a specific context. Since both discourse and materiality are formed and transformed through intra-action, (in)security, postconflict reconstruction, recon-ciliation and identity constructions should all be viewed as mutually constructed entangled processes of becoming. Agency is therefore less about an intrinsic capa-city and more about a relational process or practice.

The second pillar draws on the feminist critique of human security as ex-clusionary (see before). All feminisms are already broadly posthuman when they point to the "obsessive depiction of an anthropocentric, androcentric and logo-centric world" (Richmond 2008: 144). According to this thinking, humanism can be seen as a boundary-making practice (between some humans and 'others' or between humans and the nonhuman). In contrast, posthumanism is a boundary-breaking practice as it liberates us from Western thinking that privileges rational 'Man' over nature or elevates the male norm as the reference point for humanity.

The third pillar is an element that is neglected in current posthuman secur-

ity literature, namely postcolonialism (and by extension postcolonial feminism). The latter's critiques of the racialised reduction of all women's experiences to those of white women (Mohanty 2003) makes it the most explicit posthuman variant. When posthuman security and postcolonialism and/or postcolonial feminism are allowed to intersect, it breaks decolonial ground — it draws attention to attempts to present species, race and gender as exclusive categories and how that generates types of violence that one would not normally associate with war or conflict, such as of the structural and epistemic kind (Mitchell 2016). Postcolonial feminism reminds us that culturally constituted (gender) differences are often more than just 'differences' — they are founded upon real, material inequalities resulting from institutionalised racism and local and global divisions of labour. Drawing on Barad's notion of intra-action, one therefore also begins to see how discourses or representational modes which support bifurcated narratives of war-peace, security-insecurity, masculine-feminine and private-public and their material effects are mutually constituted.

The fourth pillar coheres around the notion of situated knowledge, or the question, from where do we speak? In the words of Donna Haraway (1988: 590) "[s]ituated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular". Taking context seriously offers the possibility for alternative security thinking, because it directs attention away from the abstract monolithic human being towards the materiality of being, experiences, senses and emotions embedded in everyday life. Seeing context as both a physical and a mental (meeting) space that encapsulates all overlapping identities, discursive representational practices and material consequences open up the possibility for constructive engagement between, for instance, Feminist Security Studies scholars and African feminists. It offers openings for viewing human (everyday) security and its intersections with state/international security and the role of objects in securing or securitising worlds differently. Rootedness in the African context always intra-acts with the global. With the postcolony and conflict and/or postconflict African arena as meeting place, the reproductive and care work of African women can be noticed for its contribution to the shaping of the world economy and economic security (Chowdhury and Ling 2010). Similarly, women's roles in 'informal' peacebuilding or their resistance to and/or co-optation into donor agenda on the ground are deeply intertwined with what happens in public spaces. Context is thus fluid and not innately linked to specific identities or socially prescribed roles. These postcolonial spaces are therefore places from where to shape values, to resist but also to appropriate.

The fifth pillar concerns the ways in which 'matter' and/or objects can be brought into the conversation about security without losing the expanded feminist

notion of the human. I identify two dimensions here: Firstly, a concern for context necessitates an interest in mundane (subject) matter related to the political economy of day-to-day security. This means paying attention to the lived and embodied experiences of war and peace as felt, at a material level between human beings and a gendered and racialised environment. Nonhuman matter such as food, land, cattle rustling and infrastructure such as water and roads have real implications for the livelihoods and security of people, particularly women. The life-and-death dangers of going to school or fetching water or wood when there is ongoing conflict, lack of roads or food insecurity and other infrastructure concerns constitute everyday matter that should be studied for how they enable and/or constrain social life. Secondly, in a feminist posthuman reading of security, one would foreground the material consequences of infrastructural power over people, especially those who are marginalised. It is argued that the development of infrastructure (for example, roads, services), when acting as a proxy for stabilisation, peacekeeping and statebuilding, becomes a tool for the control of populations. Critical infrastructure protection of airports, ports and mines turns the high walls of international security compounds to protect aid workers into militarised bunkers — effectively 'othering' and dehumanising the very people they are intended to protect (Aradau 2010; Schouten 2013). The alienating effects of these objects on the ground therefore make them more than just metaphors of separateness but also gives us a glimpse into the materiality of citizenship discourses and practices. Theresa Ammann (2017), in her study of Ebola in Liberia, views the Ebola virus through a feminist posthuman security lens as not just a virus, but as an agent and illustrates through rich ethnographic interview material how the objects entangled with it, such as treatment centres, bodies, ashes, internet, radio, guns, money, evacuation procedures, flights, electricity networks, food supply chains and vaccines all intra-act in gendered and racialised ways to reveal complex patterns of perpetrators and victims.

The last pillar of my feminist posthuman security frame extends the point about the importance of context to the African context. Grounding posthuman security in an Africa-centred perspective means taking African experiences and theories seriously. For this reason posthumanist thinking needs to engage more directly with indigenous cosmologies which are marked by a deep relationality, multi-species community and an ecological ethic (Mitchell 2016). Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) rightly remarks, that the rules of Western research methodology have "become the straitjacket that every new researcher has to wear if they are to discover knowledge. This blocks all attempts to know differently". Knowing and imagining Africa differently must first of all foreground African epistemologies as part of multiple, diverse worlds with diverse meanings of violence, harm and in-

security within them, thereby avoiding the trap of creating either a universalised or an essentialist version of posthumanity (Mitchell 2016). Secondly, an Afrocentric emphasis on spirituality and intuition as valid sources of information (Mazama 2003) broadens the understanding of human security. In African folklore (for example, Tutuola 1952), spirits, ghosts and half-humans/half-gods often take centre stage. Making these sub- or superhuman characters legitimate objects of investigation in the context of the study of security not only serves to decolonise the field of security studies, but also facilitates our ability to imagine alternative futures, that are neither binary oppositions nor lazy conflations. These figures become interlocutors between human and nonhuman worlds — representing the link between different sets of knowledges. This role strongly reminds us of the role played by women in conflict and postconflict situations where they are seen as being close to the community, having access to intelligence where they act as bridge-builders between local and security policy communities. And to link it to the university — this is the role that intellectuals and academics need to play. Equally, in the context of decolonising the university, academic and public intellectuals should serve as mediators of a 'borderland epistemology'.

7.   Towards a new research programme for human security

For all its political correctness and the need to find a vocabulary to expose unequal power relations, the notion of decolonisation is problematic because of its binary make-up — pitting coloniser against colonised. 'Gender' is equally problematic when used uncritically as a descriptor of a specific identity group, resulting in making women responsible for addressing gender imbalances. The acceptance of gender as a universal construct is disputed by some scholars from Africa and masks, just like the case of human security, underlying gendered and racialised differences. These conceptual traps manifest in real and practical ways when disciplinary fields take charge of concepts. The unintended consequences of the label Feminist Security Studies of setting up camps between scholars in the global North and the global South is made painfully visible when one examines examples of African feminist research. Here gender is deeply relational — in relation to time, and in relation to the context of broader political and historical developments.

        A postcolonial-feminist approach to the study of human security is thus presented in this article as a necessary point of departure for further attempts to decolonise human security as a concept and practice. The main focus of one such research programme is therefore to use a postcolonial-feminist lens to interrogate

the complex human and nonhuman entanglements of security and peacebuilding on the African continent. It asks, who counts as human, and what kind of relations are there between humans and nonhumans? The research focus proposes that radically rethinking how we view our human selves in relation to other matter is fundamental to achieving sustainable and inclusive peace. The security approach that I outlined above is not antihuman. Despite its critical stance towards anthropocentrism (when it is used as a lazy synonym for Public Liberal Man), the desire to decentre the human must be seen in the context of bringing marginalised human subjectivities (of the black, queer woman, among others) back in whilst operating relationally in a complex world co-constituted by diverse beings. This implies that 'security' is seen as a relational construct that straddles human and nonhuman agencies.

This approach of entanglement holds important lessons for developing a decolonised research agenda. In accordance with a posthuman feminist methodology that privileges epistemological openness and interdisciplinarity, challenges analytical neatness, and opts for incomplete holism, fluid categorisations and methodological porosity, a decolonised security programme needs to become dexterous in applying the widest possible range of theories. This also means that the range of intellectual sources as well as the types of sources of knowledge should reflect a 'transhuman' focus. Alternative 'texts' gleaned from oral sources and objects or matter such as artefacts, music, advertising, architecture and food could help to bridge gaps in Africa's long intellectual history across the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial epochs.

In the same way that it is impossible — and undesirable — to excise 'humanity' entirely from a discussion of security or politics more generally, the security concept, for all its valueladenness, should not be recklessly abandoned. Instead the concept has to be unlearnt, troubled, problematised, subverted and dismantled slowly — by stealth and not by strength. Replacing one binary with another — security versus insecurity or human versus nonhuman — is not the way to a truly decolonised African future. For that we need "to find a language, effective practices and above all a way of translating itself into new institutional forms and a new political culture in which the political struggle is not a zero-sum game" (Mbembe 2014).

Endnotes

1.   The work of Nicole Grove (2015) illustrates the material power of technology as a tool of governance or security surveillance. HarrassMap is an interactive online mapping interface for reporting and mapping incidents of sexual harassment anonymously and in real time on the streets of Cairo, Egypt. While ostensibly created to map sexual

harassment this tool could also be used by government to monitor the movements of opposition forces..

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