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Towards a democratised method of data collection through the adoption and adaptation of the Shona concept of *dare*

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ABSTRACT

This theoretical paper sought to explore the Shona concept of dare as an ideal democratised knowledge round table that could be adopted as a method of data collection in Africa. The Dare or ubiquitous circle is a participatory communication practice located among traditional Shona societies of Zimbabwe and is a potential replacement to traditional qualitative data collection tools such as interviews and focus group discussion. The goal is to promote participation and decolonise research processes in Africa by adopting existing communication practices among indigenous people. The attempt is to depart from conducting research as an extractive process conducted by the researcher and the participants, the investigator and the investigated or the analyst and the analysed. Conversely, information sharing rooted in the African concept of dare is more of knowledge round table and is participatory, democratised, recognises expertise and allows the sharing of experience. A properly structured information sharing session moulded in the dare concept is culturally grounded, built on trust, respect and is a relationship. The more knowledgeable and experienced participants have space to give direction to the data collection process. Participants have a platform to learn from each other and can identify with the collected data. The study recommends a shift from traditional data collection tools to information sharing moulded in the dare concept for reliable and authentic data collection. This African round table is more democratised and culturally grounded allowing the process not only to yield required data but also improve communities through shared experiences.

KEY TERMS: *information sharing, data collection, participatory, democratised, African, dare*

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INTRODUCTION

For long, data collection in Africa has been viewed as an extractive, imposed, one way process in which communities feel coerced to yield data. Data collected is directed by the researcher, probably to get a degree qualification or inform practice. The researcher is the one who comes armed with established research instruments to conduct what could be regarded as “his/her” research. This approach assumes that there is a superior, more knowledgeable partner who extracts data from less research oriented individuals who are subjects in the research process. The interactions and outcomes obtained largely represent the interests and bias of the researcher. Little or no consideration is made to established indigenous knowledge systems or traditional information sharing platforms that could be utilised in gathering data such as the *dare*. Communities that yield data end up not identifying with the data because the data collection process was one way, imposed and not participatory. This in part may explain why research participants do not bother to follow up and see the end product. This theoretical paper sought to return to the more traditional methods of information sharing moulded in the *dare* concept. The process would not only allow the indigenous people to have a voice but would also promote their participation in research processes.

DECOLONISATION AGENDA

This essay is part of the decolonising agenda which sought to shift from Eurocentric conception and understanding of humanity to a pluralistic approach (Chimuka, 2001). For years researchers have descended on African communities with already made research tools. Rarely do the instruments and ethical approvals carry the input of the research participants. Indigenous knowledge systems are also not considered and existing information sharing forums such as *dare* are ignored. Decolonisation is a, “critique of the dominance of Euro-Western language and thought cultural and academic imperialism” (Chilisa, Major and Khudu-Petersen, 2017: 327) Decolonising or indigenous research aims at utilising indigenous knowledge systems and world views which promote the participation of the indigenous people in the research process (Kwame, 2017).

Ncube and Tomaselli (2020) consider the *dare* as a platform for participatory communication which was established long before the arrival of the Europeans in Africa. Because Africa already have such a platform it would be inappropriate to impose other data collection platforms without first exploring what existed. Totally setting aside established indigenous systems and traditions may alienate the participants. Such an approach may fail to promote the participation of the indigenous people and the participants may not identify with the research outcomes. Thus, research would have departed from the agenda of advancing, engaging and transforming communities (Chilisa, et al. 2017).

Through the adoption of the *dare* as a traditional institution for participatory communication People who were previously marginalised and overlooked get a voice in the research process (Barnes, 2022). Utilising the *dare* enriches research as it enables the researcher to influence and be influenced by the research process as it transforms data collection to information sharing. The indigenous ways of knowing are also promoted thereby promoting equal rights in the research process (Kwame, 2017; Chilisa, et al. 2017). This responds to the call to align research methods to the intentions, context and participatory nature of indigenous knowledge (Khupe and Keane 2017). Data collected becomes a product of social cues, is participatory and is grounded in the culture of the researched African communities. The cultures of the Shona people in this way contribute to the understanding of humanity as a whole.

DARE PLATFORM AMONG THE SHONA COMMUNITIES

Two interpretations are held on the *dare* platform. It could be a tribal court or a board with judicial authority (Chimundu and Manoya, 2001). The definition of interest in this study according to the Shona dictionary *dare* or *chivara* is a meeting forum for men of village (Ncube and Tomaselli, 2020, Chimundu and Manoya, 2001). It is a traditional institution and a protocol of participatory communication (Ncube and Tomaselli, 2020). The degree of formality differentiates the *dare* from the *dariro*. *Dare* is more formalised. In traditional Shona communities the place was a small distance away from the homes and was a mandatory meeting place for all men (Ncube and Tomaselli, 2020).

The defining features of *dare* include that, it was a mandatory meeting place for all men, evening meals were shared, and information and experiences were shared (Gombe, 2000). These Ethical considerations were also made e.g confidentiality; what was discussed at a *dare* stayed at the *dare* (*Zvataurwa padare zvinogara padare*). For Ncube and Tomaselli (2020) the *dare* is a solidarity relational philosophy. This implies that the platform goes

beyond just a meeting but it builds relations and solidarity for the participants. The information shared at the round table is driven by the desired outcomes.

The *dare* was also an educational authority or law giving authority (Ncube and Tomaselli, 2020). The process of sharing information was also meant to educate as more knowledgeable elders shared experience with the young and growing population. In the village at sundown men would gather around a fire to share experiences, knowledge and information at a *dare*. Men of various age groups would all attend. The discussion did not centre on any specific topic but what was important was to transmit their heritage from one generation to the next. Social skills such as courtship or negotiations were trained at the *dare*. Young boys of age learnt the necessary skills and often they obtained the desired apt results. The knowledgeable elders would share information in which attributes such as humility, being brave, loyalty and hard work were some of the thematic lines underlining the discussions. At a *dare* anyone could bring forth the topic for discussion implying that the process was democratised.

It was acceptable that at a *dare* not everyone was equal. The elders always had last say and gave direction to the development of the narrative. Respect was always given to the more knowledgeable and experienced elders. It was expected that someone could be banished for constantly sharing irrelevant information that may distort the narratives. Thus, in all the information shared be it in the form of folk tales at a *dare* was meant to share their underlined norms and values.

From such defining features, a *dare* has potential when utilised as a data collection to yield rich data. This is because the approach is already rooted within the traditions and culture of the Shona people. The researchers sought to explore how the values of such a platform could be adopted and adapted as a data collection method in research.

UBUNTU ROOTS OF *DARE* IN AFRICAN COMMUNITIES

Dare was an information sharing round table through which indigenous knowledge among the Shona communities of Zimbabwe were passed from generation to generation. This was the basis on which the Ubuntu philosophy was transmitted and preserved. At a *dare* the important values and practises that make Africans authentic human beings were imparted (Zvomuya, 2020). Solidarity, reciprocity, interconnectedness and bonding are some of the key tenets in the Ubuntu philosophy that relied on platforms such as *dare* for their transmission and preservation. The Ubuntu brand as we find it needed such platforms for continuity. A lot can still be drawn from *dare* system in the conduct of research and in the quest to transform data collection to information sharing to improve on beneficence.

Ubuntu as a philosophy emphasises “being self through others” (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). By sharing information one would have demonstrated being selfless which also defines Ubuntu. The process of sharing information was a two way process as it was motivated by the desire to build a bond. According to Mugumbate and Nyaguru (2013) Ubuntu relates to bonding and this is expressed through the saying, *I am because we are and I am human because I belong*. When young men and old men gathered around a bonfire for their *dare* session it not only resulted in the sharing of knowledge and experiences but bonds were built. The norms and values of the community were therefore transmitted and preserved.

Interconnectedness is what defines Ubuntu (Zvomuya, 2020). When members of a family gathered for their *dare* session, they become interconnected and bonds were built. Ubuntu philosophy recognises the universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity (Mavesera, Mavuru and Nyanhanda, 2018). Sharing in this case implied not only sharing resources but also information. The Shona saw value in sharing information and avoid overreliance on one’s own opinion. This is explained by the Shona proverb, ‘*Zano ndoga akasiya jira mumasese*’ meaning there is danger in relying solely on one’s own opinion. Extensive consultations were made at a *dare* before a decision was made and usually the decision of the majority or that of elders “*vakatanga kuona zuva*” meaning those who saw the sun first (born first) prevailed.

The expected community norms and values were shared at a *dare*. The young get acquainted with acceptable standards that would guide them every day. Experts in any given area were afforded the opportunity to share their experiences for the benefit of the community. These processes also made their behaviours predictable. This again facilitated bonding which was a critical element underlining the Ubuntu philosophy (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). They bonded in their diversity. Bonding that has become the hallmark of Ubuntu among African communities, was not only an outcome but was in fact a process facilitated by information sharing round tables such as *dare*.

According to Zvomuya (2020) Ubuntu philosophy is characterised by interconnectedness. People reached the stage of saying “I am because we are” because effort would have been made to build the interconnectedness and bonding through platforms such as *dare* (Mungai, 2015). The Ubuntu base of relatedness is critical in the drive for interconnectedness. The relational ethical framework calls for the participants to see self as a reflection of

others and also to honour and respect others as one would have wished for oneself (Chilisa, 2017). Sharing information and experiences facilitated by platforms such as *dare* allowed communities to identify with each other. Community members also respect each other in their diversity.

APPLICATION OF *DARE* APPROACH IN DATA COLLECTION

The way in which *dare* was organised and structured among the Shona communities can bring forth tangible lessons that could be utilised in data collection. Social researchers in Africa have been accused of having a mercenary attitude in which they extract data for their own studies and failing to impact on the researched communities. Adopting indigenous frameworks and knowledge systems is the hallmark of Ubuntu (Zvomuya, 2020). Through the adoption of the *dare* system research would be transformed and fitted within the framework of the indigenous knowledge system. This has potential not only to yield data that is rich for the researcher but data that participants identify with and leaves significant marks within the researched communities. The important tenets of Ubuntu such as interconnectedness, solidarity, self-respect, collective visioning become the envisioned end benefits from the research process.

Interconnectedness in data collection

Social research relies a lot on group interactions and it is important to create the correct environment that would allow the process to be natural, inclusive and mutually beneficial. To get to this end researchers in Africa need to utilise the existing knowledge systems and structures. Instead of setting up new and foreign data gathering methods, this paper advocates for adopting and modifying what is already present in the indigenous knowledge system. Information sharing round table called *dare* among the Shona communities brings forth important lessons that enriches data collection. Data collection would cease from being driven by the end product but is a relationship and a network. The researcher and the researched community enter into a relationship guided by honour and respect. The relationship is guided by the relational ethical framework in which the researcher sees 'self' as a reflection of 'other' (Chilisa et al. 2017).

The *dare* was a participatory information sharing platform. Ncube and Tomaselli (2020) view *dare* as one of the institutions or protocol for participatory communication among indigenous Shona communities. The more knowledgeable and experienced individuals utilised the *dare* session to share and empower other community members. This key approach is a key component missing in data collection approaches such as interviews, focus group discussions and group discussions. Participants are largely expected to respond to the researcher's questions. Once the questions are answered the research ends. The interests of the participants rarely go beyond what the researcher wants. This explains why the participants rarely given the opportunity to ask questions. Thus, research in Africa can borrow this participatory approach used in *dare* sessions. Social research would be collaborative and research participants would have a say in the research process. Participants could also shape the direction that the research would take because they would view themselves as equal partners who are sharing information.

Besides sharing information meals were often shared at a *dare* forum (Ncube and Tomaselli. The sharing of food continued to represent the Ubuntu culture. The process ensured that no one could go to bed hungry. It was common to have one common bowl for the staple sadza and another bowl for the relish and everyone would share from it. This process would help build interconnectedness among the African communities. Sharing a meal while sharing information at a *dare* was not regarded as similar to paying for data or unethical. The whole process was meant to build bonds, build relationships and interconnectedness. Information was shared to build bonds, educate and improve the community.

Collaborative transformation and empowerment in data collection

Empowerment was one of the objectives in the *dare* session. Information sharing was often driven by the desire to empower the young and the community with required skills. "It is a place for considering one another and one another's contributions, ideas, needs, aspirations and concerns; the place of looking forward together; the place of collective morale, mutual confidence building, faith and optimism built on consensus, trust and reconciliation of otherwise" Mahoso (2018). Research in Africa needs to be driven by a similar approach. Data collection in social research should be driven by similar goals, i.e. empowerment of the researched community. The more knowledgeable research participants are expected to share their knowledge and experiences for the benefit of the community. Research participants in this case are active participants. This approach fits in the goals of

participatory research and facilitates collaborative transformation and empowerment of community members. Research in this regard becomes a relationship.

Stories shared at a *dare* session often followed similar thematic lines that were based on Ubuntu. Tenets and virtues such as hard work self-respect, Unhu, social skills and solidarity dominated the storylines. In other words information sharing left significant marks on the participants. The behaviour of younger participants fitted within the norms and values of their community. In a similar fashion, data collection in research needs to be mutually beneficial as it should leave a mark on the research participants.

Enriching research through adopting the *dare* approach would enrich the data collection process. Data collection would have an impact on the researched communities as it helps build solidarity, interconnectedness, collective visioning or harmony among communities. This gives value to data collection in research. According to Khupe and Keane (2017) research needs to be relevant and should endeavour to improve the quality of life of the indigenous people. This end could be attained through the adaptation and adaptation of existing indigenous information sharing platforms such as the *dare* among Shona communities.

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends the deployment of traditional African communication forums such as the *dare* in data collection. Adoption of *dare* as a data collection platform is a two way reciprocal process that would help in building sustainable communities as it is rooted in the African culture. While the researcher benefits from the research data, communities are also empowered. Further exploration of the *dare* platform and similar traditional communication forums is required so that research in Africa yields data that the Africans identify with.

This paper recommends a shift from data collection tools and approaches that ignore established indigenous communication practices. It is no secret that the knowledge production is replete and dominated by Eurocentric constructs and processes. Hence, the clarion call to a shift that would allow data collection processes that are culturally grounded through a strategy Omodan (2020) calls 'disruptive caring pedagogy'. Essentially, we advocate an approach that seeks to decolonise knowledge production by embracing Afrocentric approaches such as the *dare* concept.

CONCLUSION

Information sharing round tables moulded on the *dare* concept proves to be an appropriate data collection tool among African communities. This is because the key tenets that build the African are integrated. The *dare* concept gives valuable take home lessons in the conduct of research as it promotes Ubuntu. Research would be guided by self-respect, solidarity, honour and is a relationship where bonds are built. The collaborative and participatory nature of indigenous knowledge systems get aligned to the research. It is important to consider that Africans have been sharing information before the coming of Europeans. In consideration of that it would be inappropriate to deploy data collection methods that do not have African roots at least when conducting research in Africa.

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