

BEYOND BINARIES

9 & 10
SEPT
2026



NOTES FROM THE FIELD: ETHNOGRAPHY AND EXTRACTION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

SPONSORED BY THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE,
THE FRENCH NATIONAL CENTRE FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH, AND IFAS-RESEARCH

WISER SEMINAR ROOM, BRAAMFONTEIN EAST CAMPUS

BACKGROUND

The School of Social Sciences at Wits University, in partnership with the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD) and IFAS-Research, continues its collaboration through the Beyond Binaries project. Following the first symposium held in September 2025 and the presentation of papers at the SASA Conference in July, this September symposium provides a further opportunity to strengthen the work of postgraduate students and emerging researchers and to deepen conversations across disciplines around fieldwork, ethics and knowledge production. The symposium aims to create a supportive space in which participants can critically reflect on the ethical, methodological and political dimensions of research, including questions of positionality, representation, power and the conditions under which knowledge is produced.

Recent debates around decolonisation have demonstrated – yet again – that knowledge will always be for someone and for some purpose. At the same time, however, there has also been a tendency to (re)treat (to) decolonisation as a theoretical conversation – or metaphor – rather than a pragmatic imperative. In its current form, decolonisation is largely discretionary. Some opt in, most opt out. And academics who opt in frequently understand decolonisation in highly theoretical terms. Instead of transforming the academy, decolonial theories have increasingly become an elite specialisation within the academy, which is oriented towards self-selecting post-graduate students and theorists. “Theorising from the Global South” risks becoming an exercise in depoliticisation through abstraction if it isn’t sufficiently embedded within practical and political concerns.

This is why we have fieldwork, ethics and knowledge economies taking centre stage here. Within Africa, fieldwork often suggests the figure of the “native informant”, who is typically positioned as an unacknowledged assistant/broker/translator for European experts who show up at “exotic” locations for short trips to ask locals questions and then return home to build their careers. This in turn sustains “a global division of labour where southerners become data collectors while northerners produce knowledge and offer scholarly and policy critiques” (Landau 2012, 563). The problems with this extractive model are well known, and there has been much talk of moving from extraction to equity in recent times. These include projects focusing on training local researchers, paying researchers and respondents fairly, creating pathways for career advancement, naming all researchers involved in published outputs, and structuring projects and outputs in ways that respond to/reflect local priorities and perspectives, such as participatory action research (Bunting et al 2023).

There is no way to fully transcend existing knowledge economies anytime soon, but it is feasible to expose their effects and to identify more equitable pathways and partnerships.

The symposium contains three main elements as follows:

- Plenary sessions which provide resources and readings to help with revisions. At the moment we have a solid empirical foundation, but they aren’t yet sufficiently grounded in the larger debates and relevant literatures, so we want to provide additional guidance on authors and sources.
- Small group sessions that focus on the nuts and bolts of individual papers. The main goal of these sessions is to generate ideas and plans for a final round of revisions ahead of submission of papers to the press
- Bringing together the Sciences and Humanities The final session of our event will be a public roundtable focusing on fieldwork experiences in the sciences and humanities in relation to fieldwork and ethics. This forms part of our phase two plan, and we should be able to offer more fieldwork bursaries towards the end of the year, with sciences included this time.

OBJECTIVES

- To create a space for constructive engagement with individual papers in a small-group setting with a view to finalising papers for submission for peer-review
- To continue the conversation about methods and ethics as fields of inquiry in their own right.
- To deepen participants’ understanding of positionality and its implications for research, including questions of representation and the relationship between researchers and those whose lives and experiences they study.
- To strengthen conversations across the Humanities and Sciences around researcher safety, vulnerability and the need for stronger institutional safeguards.

AGENDA

9 SEPTEMBER

9:00 | TEA & COFFEE, REGISTRATION

09:30 | WELCOME

Lorena Nunez-Carrasco, Social Sciences,
Wits & **Joel Quirk**, Politics, Wits

10:00 | PANEL 1: THE CURRENT STATE OF
RESEARCH ON METHODS & ETHICS

Joel Quirk
Dilip Menon, International Relations,
Wits
Sarah Nuttall, WiSER
Chair: **Khangelani Moyo**, UFS

12:00 | LUNCH

13:00 | BREAKOUT GROUPS (SEE BELOW)

FROM 15:00 | TEA & COFFEE BREAK

16:00 | OPTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR
PUBLICATIONS

Annael Le Poullennec, IFAS-Research &
Joel Quirk

18:00 | DINNER

Wits Club

10 SEPTEMBER

08:30 | TEA & COFFEE

09:00 | REFLECTIONS ON SMALL GROUP
DISCUSSIONS

Lorena Nunez-Carrasco & **Joel Quirk**

10:00 | PANEL 2: POSITIONALITY

Mbuso Nkosi, Sociology, Wits
Victoria Collis- Buthelezi, WiSER, Wits
Paola Prandini, Wits Centre for Diversity
Studies
Chair: **Lorena Nunez-Carrasco**

12:00 | LUNCH

13:00 | ROUNDTABLE ON RESEARCHER SAFETY:
BRINGING TOGETHER CONCERNS FROM ACROSS
THE HUMANITIES & SCIENCES

Laurent Bruxelles, CNRS
Mary Evans, Geography, Wits
Nechama Brodie, Journalism, Wits
Joel Quirk

15:00 | WRAP UP & FINAL REFLECTIONS

Lorena Nunez-Carrasco & **Laurent Vidal**,
IRD

BREAKOUT GROUPS

GROUP ONE: SOSS SEMINAR ROOM

Lorena Núñez Carrasco to lead the discussion

- Blessing Mukuruva
- Bothwell Vumai
- Primrose Hove
- Msawenkosi Gibson Nzimande

GROUP TWO: RS223

Khangelani Moyo to lead the discussion with

- John Keketso Peete
- Kristina Tobias
- Edmond Madhuha
- Nobantu Shabangu

GROUP THREE: ANTHROPOLOGY MUSEUM

Dilip Menon to lead the discussion with

- Kgolagano Vena
- Patrick A. Nyathi
- Neave Anne Geoghegan

GROUP FOUR: WISER SEMINAR ROOM

Annael Le Poullennec to lead the discussion with

- Lerato Priscilla Sauhatsi
- Yukako Ban
- Vutlhari Joy Tlakula
- Hannah Krienke

GROUP FIVE: ANTHROPOLOGY MUSEUM

Johannes Machinerya to lead the discussion with

- Bambanani Gwedla
- Karabo-Maya Rodwell
- Ming-kai Sam
- Muhammad Vawda

GROUP SIX: RS231

Joel Quirk to lead the discussion with

- Trevor van Wyk
- Humairaa Mayet
- Thulani Baloyi
- Nicola Booysen