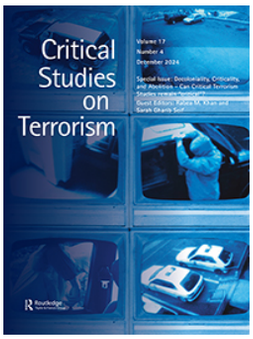

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The *critical terrorism researcher*: identity, positionality, and (de)coloniality

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ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) has been crucial in contributing to critical research on terrorism that challenges the troublesome assumptions about "terrorism" developed in the field of Terrorism Studies, and which investigates the complexities that shape (counter-)terrorism in various socio-political contexts, especially so in the "post-9/11 era". This has, however, also enabled the production of the identity of a uniquely *critical terrorism researcher* which, I argue in this article, is acutely underwritten by colonial epistemologies and assumptions that underpin "terrorism". By drawing upon relevant insights from decolonial scholarship on the link between identity and knowledge production, especially through my engagement with Sylvia Wynter's discourse on "Man and the coloniality of being", this article aims to problematise the CTS researcher as a specific idea of Man (usually Western/white/bourgeoise/heterosexual) shaped by various descriptive statements including those about emancipation and inclusion that seeks to legitimise researchers in this sub-field as progenitors of genuine discourses about "terrorism". By de-centring the CTS researcher through reflecting on my own research practices, choices and priorities, the article contributes to CTS debates on methodology as well as to the debate on "terrorism expertise". It concludes by offering some reflections on the future of CTS.

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Introduction

This article is an attempt to articulate a range of reflections as a researcher whose research interest lies, rather uneasily, within Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS hereafter).[1] The main argument pursued here is based on the observation that critical research on terrorism can also be a Western imperialist project or uphold Western hegemony in spite of the discourses (and practices) of emancipation and progressivism. While CTS seeks to orient an alternative, reflective approach to the study of terrorism, certain intellectual and normative commitments developed within CTS scholarship are fundamentally shaped, and undermined, by Western epistemologies and practices which sustain – rather than resist – "terrorism".[2]

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CTS has occasionally been described as a "broad church" to highlight the diversity of perspectives and contributions to its intellectual project. Such an inclusionist, yet distinctly ethno-theo-centric, framing ostensibly aims to "broaden" CTS' intellectual scope to provide space for certain marginalised knowledges, especially those from communities disproportionately affected by terrorism and counter-terrorism discourses and practices (including Muslim communities, global South, queer communities). Yet, promoting "pluralism for pluralism's sake" (Jonathan as quoted in Hayward (2011, 58) or for other emancipatory ambitions often ignores important hegemonic structures – and practices – that shape knowledge (production) about "terrorism", even within such a seemingly critical space. This also has implications for the researchers working within this sub-field given that the category and discourses on "terrorism" along with the colonial – as well as racist, classed, and gendered – assumptions that underpin them often shape critical research and determine who, what, and how knowledge on this subject is produced, as well as its function(s) and (un)intended outcomes.

To examine the link between coloniality and (researcher-)identity, this article is informed by the question posed by Enrique Dussel (2011, 16): "who are we [critical researchers] and where do we [they] speak from"? As Burke (2008) points out, the relevance of CTS should be weighed against "its forms, purposes, and functions; that is, the kind of 'power' it wants its 'knowledge' to become." Thus, by taking seriously the political and epistemic significance of the identity of the *critical terrorism researcher,* this article seeks to investigate how "who we are and where we speak from" matters for the kind of expertise and knowledge about "terrorism" "we" produce, or authorise (see Moya 2011, 79). Along this line, I investigate the *critical terrorism researcher* in this article as a specific conception of Man (usually white/western/bourgeoise/heterosexual) shaped by certain descriptive statements and discourses – including those about reflexivity, inclusion, and emancipation – which reinforces Western hegemony and domination. Indeed, S. Wynter's (2003) re-formulation of the Heideggerian, ontological question of being (i.e. who or what we are) by locating the connection between the epistemic groundings and ideas about Man, and the kind of Human it produces, is relevant here for examining the connection between (CTS) researcher-identity and coloniality. The onto-epistemological effects of coloniality, I argue in this article, essentially facilitate the production of an imagined identity of the *critical terrorism researcher*, as well as his authorial significance which is grounded on liberal emancipatory ideas (and practices).

To make the above argument, I take an auto-ethnographical approach in which I reflect on my research practices (and encounters) as an early-career researcher from the global South involved in the knowledge fields of terrorism and counter-terrorism. While auto-ethnographic research generally seeks to foreground the experiences, perspectives, interests and voice of its individual (situated) subject (L. Jackson 2021), my approach in this article, which is inspired by a decolonial method (Tuhiwai Smith 2005), ultimately seeks to "deconstruct" the CTS researcher so much so that any authentic identity that might emerge from this reflection is already implicated in – the struggle against – colonial captivity and subjection. Also, while acknowledging the implications (and potential value) of proclaiming one's criticality and positionality, this undertaking is neither intended to be self-indulgent, confessional, nor a revision of my previous works and arguments developed therein. It is important to state, though, that I am not a decolonial scholar and my previous work has been mostly informed by post-structural and postcolonial thought.[3] My

engagement with decolonial scholarship here is part of my continuing development and reflection on the discourses around "terrorism" and is shaped by the numerous discussions, communities, and networks that I engage with and continue to learn from.[4]

The relevance of the argument developed in this article includes a call for knowledge decolonisation and resistance to the discourse of "terrorism". It also highlights the problem of academic complicity, or, more appropriately, the intricate link between critique and complicity in relation to critical research on terrorism,[5] and beyond (see de Goede 2020). This article also has a broader relevance for discussions around the future of CTS, especially in light of the various decolonizing projects and approaches to violence and resistance (Seidel 2017). These contributions can be split into three: (1) the continuing debate about the emergence and purpose(s) of critical research on terrorism; (2) contemporary work on terrorism expertise and experts; and more broadly (3) the decolonisation of academic knowledge production especially through interrogating the discourses and practices that shape academic knowledge and expertise in CTS.

The rest of this article proceeds as follows: the first section below examines the construction of the CTS researcher implicitly or otherwise by the different camps in Terrorism Studies (including Orthodox and critical variants in this field). Following on from this, the second section explores the connection between terrorism, coloniality and identity to develop a theoretical scaffold for my engagement in the substantive parts of this article. The final section on de-centring the *critical terrorism researcher* examines the production of this researcher-identity through reflecting on my own research practice and engagements. I conclude by elaborating on my overarching argument and its implications for CTS going forward.

The *critical terrorism researcher*: beyond activists or mimics?

The following section explores the construction of the CTS researcher using the frameworks of "activist-scholars" and "mimics" as analytical devices to highlight certain dilemmas and limitations of CTS' research enterprise, especially in relation to coloniality.[6] On the one hand, "activist-scholars" posit a reformist idea (and agenda) of CTS and the researchers working within this sub-field notwithstanding various internal debates about the scope, aims, and contribution of CTS. On the other hand, the designation of the CTS researcher as a "mimic", which is commonly conjured in the works of different scholars outside the CTS bloc (Orthodox and "more-critical" Terrorism Studies),[7] queries the emergence and relevance of a distinctly "critical" sub-field in terrorism studies as well as the positioning of the researchers therein (reflective, reflexive, innovative, reformists). These identities, though produced by different camps in terrorism studies and highlighting different ideas and positions of the CTS researcher, often intersect, and indeed, share certain limitations especially regarding the colonial epistemes and discourses that shape them in relation to the production of terrorism knowledge as explained further below.

CTS comprises a growing network of scholars, community activists, and practitioners with a general commitment to "deepening" the study of terrorism (Jarvis 2009). CTS' research agenda is characteristically ambitious, and its intellectual boundary is fluid, evolving, and encourages different kinds of reflections, questions, and approaches to terrorism and counter-terrorism. Earlier writings and commentaries by the "founding

parents" of CTS emphasised the pledge to "an openly and self-consciously critical approach to the study of terrorism that is practically engaged and committed to social reform" (R. Jackson, M. Breen Smyth 2009, 2). According to R. Jackson (2009, 1),

> It has been possible to detect a growing sense of unease from many different quarters with both the state of much current terrorism studies research output, and the practical outworking of Western counterterrorism policies – which are often rooted in, or at least legitimised with reference to, the Orthodox Terrorism Studies … Inspired by the experience of Critical Security Studies, a small group of scholars deliberately set out to stimulate, encourage, and articulate the nascent but observable 'critical turn' within the broader terrorism studies field.

The above observation points to the dissatisfaction with the problem-solving tendencies and positivist orthodoxy prevalent in terrorism research, which supposedly stirred this "first stream" of CTS scholarship (i.e. the lack of contextualisation and primary research, a-historicity, state bias, self-reflexivity or lack thereof). With regard to the boundary, and the importance of inclusivity in its intellectual project notwithstanding its supposedly "critical" stance Gunning (2007, 238), notes that: "CTS must grapple with how to create sufficient space for critical studies without ghettoising itself and leaving the 'mainstream' to its traditional tendencies." The aim, therefore, he adds, is "how to ensure the inclusion of both critically-minded traditionalists and the wide variety of critical scholars, without imploding internally." Indeed, CTS has made several notable contributions to the study of "terrorism" as a classificatory schema for designating a particular type of political violence whether through problematising the dominant assumptions about terrorism, through the promotion of different methodologies and theoretical orientations, and of course, through highlighting the knowledge-power nexus in representations of terrorism (R. Jackson 2007; Gunning 2007; Breen Smyth et al. 2008). The practice of critique as developed by – and within – CTS, in short, has contributed immensely to developing grammars useful for investigating contemporary counter-terrorism practices in different geopolitical contexts, including those shaped by colonial and neo-colonial designs.

Following the above agenda-setting exercise, however, the CTS research project has continued to evolve in different directions, and often, adopting different theoretical orientations including post-structuralist, constructivist, feminist perspectives, postcolonialism, as well as approaches that draw on the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (Jackson 2021; Herring 2008; Chukwuma 2022b; Stump and Dixit 2012). This has frequently led to a divergence from, and certainly the contestation of, the "original" aims set out in earlier works as described above. Indeed, a range of issues and concerns has been covered in CTS, such as those related to the use of the category of terrorism itself (broadening terrorism and state terrorism research) (Jarvis and Lister 2014), the meaning and practice of critique (CTS' engagement with policy, and the relationship between research and activism) (Toros 2012), and, more recently, the lack of the treatment of colonialism, race and racism in (critical) terrorism studies (Khan 2021; Groothuis 2020).

In reference to the idea of activist-scholars introduced above, Hayward (2011, 70), in discussing how to "toughen up CTS", notes that "we find ourselves in mean times, and in such times, there is no neat choice between political involvement and the analysis of subjects such as crime and terrorism – only dangerous implications to be traced and hard questions to be asked." The aim here, in a Marxian sense, is not only to understand or re-

define "terrorism" but also entail a call-to-action; that is, to actively contest and/or change the prevailing discourses about "terrorism", as well as contemporary counter-terrorism practices. Similarly, in articulating an activist-scholar agenda for CTS, Herring (2008, 197), points out that such a research endeavour involves the use of (CTS) scholarship for "supporting non-violent action against oppression", in the form of an emancipatory practice "motivated by the desire to assist [others] or prevent harm to them because they are fellow human begins." The emancipatory universalism that underpins this conceptualisation of CTS' research agenda ineluctably constructs the CTS researcher as a "self-appointed emancipator" (Michel and Richards 2009, 408), a reformist, and an advocate of the "other" of counter-terrorism (whoever that might be, from those framed as "terrorists", to Muslim communities, to societies in the global South, and so on) against certain causes of harm, including the state and other structures that perpetuate various forms of oppression.

The above construction of the CTS researcher also appears in some earlier interventions by CTS scholars. Gunning (2007), for one, originally argued for a "critical turn" in terrorism studies to reverse certain dominant trends in the field; noting that, such a critical approach should be inclusive, policy relevant and, by the same token, emancipatory. While being attentive to the different ways in which these themes and research objectives have been treated – and contested – within CTS,[8] the inclusive, interventionist or reformist ideas that underpin this definition of "critical" research invariably invoke an imagined identity of the CTS researcher as an activist-scholar. Moreover, the notion of "emancipation" which affirms this identity is often seen as central to, or relevant for, any critical project (including CTS) given that to be "critical" supposedly entails holding an alternative view about how things could be different in spite of certain prevailing status quo. This commitment to an ethical normative research agenda, which is often narrowly defined and does not (explicitly) resist terrorism discourses and the structures they enable or sustain, has been developed most strongly in the Frankfurt School variant of CTS, as well as in some post-structuralist and postcolonial analysis as I show in the substantive parts of this article by reflecting on my own work. Importantly, this construction of the CTS researcher as an activist-scholar which conflates reflexivity and liberal emancipatory ambitions ultimately seeks to fix the position of the CTS researcher, *internally*, in the knowledge fields of (counter-)terrorism as the producer of legitimate discourses about "terrorism". This researcher-identity, however, is deeply shaped by the colonial and racist assumptions that saturate terrorism discourses,[9] especially the notions of "emancipation, liberal universalism and freedom that prescribe the domination of the vast majority of the world" (S. Wynter 2003, 324).

The above representation notwithstanding, CTS has been occasionally scrutinised in terrorism studies by different "positivist" and "critical" camps in the field. Notable among the plethora of criticisms levelled against CTS, including those treated in this article, is concerning the scope and aims of its intellectual and political project which has been described as fluid, redundant, and is, often, mired in normative discourses including those about emancipation (McGowan 2016; Michel and Richards 2009; Jones and Smith 2009). Other critiques highlight how CTS scholarship is (still) structured and temporalised by 9/11 (Michel and Richards 2009), as well as the lack of engagement with issues related to colonialism, race and racism (Abu-Bakare 2020). Moreover, the expertization of CTS scholars in the post-9/11 period further exerts strains on its purported commitment to

"critical" research in a Coxian sense (Cox 1981). These criticisms, which are articulated most strongly by scholars in the Orthodox Terrorism camp (though reinforced in other "more-critical" works in the field), produce another important identity of the CTS researcher: "mimic". This designation essentially seeks to unsettle the above-discussed notion of activist-scholar – and the internally oriented posturing – by highlighting various flaws in CTS scholarship, especially with regard to its normative commitment to emancipatory research (McGowan 2016). As Horgan and Boyle (2008, 61) note,

> It is manifestly clear from the papers produced under the CTS banner so far that this is an intellectual project, designed to reclaim 'terrorism' from 'orthodox terrorism scholarship' and to insist on a different interpretation of its context and causes. But in calling for the establishment of an explicitly 'Critical' Terrorism Studies, the onus of responsibility is on its advocates to make a clear case for not only how this is justified, and with appropriate, transparent, and clearly articulated evidence, but also to demonstrate how the concerns implicitly claimed to be characteristic of CTS, are sufficient to distinguish it from what it says is the 'orthodoxy', which presumably is bereft of such concerns.

The above, in part, points to CTS' attempt to bifurcate the field of terrorism studies through elaborating an ostensibly "critical" perspective underpinned by a moral and political purpose of advancing social justice, which draws heavily from Critical Theory. According to Horgan and Boyle (2008, 54), "serious and reflective scholars of terrorism also do not deny the link between knowledge and power, but what they do not share is the explicit normative and ideological commitments to 'emancipation', however defined." Such an explicit commitment to emancipation, they note, creates a "strawman which helps position CTS in the field [of terrorism studies] but is not based on a well-grounded critique of current research on terrorism" (Horgan and Boyle 2008, 57). While Horgan and Boyle share some of CTS' concerns and criticisms of the field, they, however, strive to uphold the "objectivity" – and integrity – of terrorism research and expertise as opposed to orienting an outwardly subjective, ethical-normative stance. This, however, produces a specific image of the CTS researcher as a mimic, in contrast to other "serious" reflective scholars in the field of terrorism studies.

Similarly, Michel and Richards (2009) argued that the novelty of CTS has been overstated and does not give due recognition to pre-existing works inspired by similar questions and critical attitude, both within terrorism studies and beyond it. Their criticism here is specifically targeted at the Frankfurt School-inspired approach developed in CTS, which fuses reflexivity with a "strong normative agenda revolving around the notion of emancipation" (Michel and Richards 2009, 401). The foregoing raises a pertinent question about CTS' research enterprise albeit rhetorical and timeworn, but certainly significant here for thinking about the link between identity and terrorism knowledge production: why (do) we need an explicitly CTS approach and researchers at all? In other words, this identity of mimic or a strawman positions the CTS researcher outside the realm of "serious" terrorism research; thus, highlighting the struggle that underpins knowledge production in this field.

Both lines of critique (and identities) explained above may come from opposing ontological camps (i.e. positivist and critical); however, they are worth looking at together as they both point to the same problem CTS still exhibits: the normalisation of "terrorism". It is worth pointing out that there are various, and often divergent, perspectives of the CTS research agenda and objectives which move away from the normative commitment to

emancipation. Hence, my own critique here is targeted at the Frankfurt-School inspired CTS and those critical interventions that espouse a seemingly progressive agenda which wittingly or otherwise nurture "terrorism" (see also Sjoberg 2024; Abu Bakare, 2024). The distinction between the "analytical" and "political" significance (and uses) of terrorism has been emphasised in challenging this scholar and activist entanglement. Instead, these studies recognise the strategic use of "terrorism" for different purposes, including for developing anti-hegemonic critiques (see Blakeley 2007). Along this line, Heath-Kelly (2010) questions the "pearl-fishing" approach adopted by CTS in developing its ethical normative commitment, suggesting an alternative route through a contextual, and non-objective, interpretation of emancipation which eschews the liberal universalisms that undergird (and undermine) CTS' appropriation of Critical Theory.

Furthermore, there are other important, "more-critical" analyses of terrorism which sit outside CTS, illustrating how colonialism and race/racism – continue to – shape discourses around (counter-)terrorism; however "critical" they may seem to be since such inquiries are enabled, and at the same time, conditioned by the same thing it seeks to explain (instead of abolishing). Orthodox Terrorism studies and its Critical counterpart as Abu-Bakare (2020, 81), points out, "might not be different from other white-dominated fields [in IR]", insofar as they are fundamentally shaped by coloniality and the discourses on terrorism which designate a specific kind of threat and structureknowledge around it according to Western modernity and race. Thus, emancipation denotes a moral and political ambition to liberate, or integrate, those constructed as the constitutive outside of Western modernity without necessarily seeking to dismantle the ideological, material, and epistemic foundations that enable and perpetuate the discourses on "terrorism". While I agree with the criticisms developed in this literature, which certainly transcend those elaborated in OTS and CTS, they nonetheless reinforce the idea of the CTS researcher as a mimic who – essentially – reproduces various colonial, white-centric logics associated with "terrorism" (research).

Although these come from opposing factions in terrorism studies (Orthodox and Critical), highlighting different perspectives and identities of the CTS researcher, they share certain limitations that are worth pointing out. Importantly, these identities are – broadly – shaped by concerns about, and acutely invested in, the production of terrorism knowledge (i.e. framing the function and kind of knowledge terrorism research should produce or authorise, and more importantly, who the legitimate producer of such knowledge is). This struggle over knowledge production and identity inevitably overrepresents – and further normalises – "terrorism" however,[10] reinforcing various colonial epistemologies that create, maintain, and normalise practices of domination and exclusion (including emancipation, terrorism expertise and objectivity). To put this in a different way, the above-discussed representations keep the concept of "terrorism" as well as its colonial, racist, and gendered constituents intact by orienting various counter-discourses and reformist agendas, rather than resisting or abandoning it.

Moreover, CTS, given its commitment to self-reflexivity, has continuously examined the role of terrorism expertise/experts especially with regard to the so-called "terrorologists" involved in the production and dissemination of "terrorism knowledge" (see Miller and Mills 2009). Using various concepts such as "embedded expertise", "invisible college", and "terrorism industry", CTS scholars have tried to show the complexity – and complicity – of "the marketplace of terrorism expertise and the spaces in which it evolves" (media, policy,

think tanks, academia, and techno-spaces) (Marshall, 2023). The critique of terrorism expertise/experts in CTS literature, though, seems to extend mostly to, or is disproportionately linked to, Orthodox Terrorism Studies and the researchers whose work falls within this tradition. After all, CTS is deemed to be committed to a critically engaged scholarship which seemingly provides a faultless ground for CTS researchers to develop their own critique of terrorism and related research practices.

The linkages, perils, and opportunities possible in engaging with policy/practice as noted above have been examined in CTS (Toros 2012). Much of these analyses often overstate the value and aim(s) of this relationship (to promote alternative, and progressive, policies), which ultimately contribute to shoring up the object of critique: terrorism. Essentially, they take-for-granted the structures that shape certain researcher-identity and expertise and what this means for knowledge production, dissemination and consumption. As Stampnitzky observed, CTS "lacks a significantly developed theory of how it is that [certain] structural connections shape the discursive content (and practice) of terrorism expertise [and experts]" (Stampnitzky 2011, 6). Thus, this article is, in part, a response to the call for "re-engaging with the theme of expertise in CTS in the post-9/11 era" (Marshall, 2023, p. 86). By moving away from the dominant framings of "activist-scholar" or "mimic" which essentially extend or contribute to discourses of terrorism as well as the struggle for relevance within a "colonial marketplace" (Sen, 1998),[11] I show how this imagined identity of the CTS researcher/expert is shaped by colonial epistemes, as well as highlighting opportunities for resistance and "emancipation" (from "terrorism").

Terrorism, coloniality, and identity

Following on from my engagement above, I explore the link between terrorism discourse, coloniality and identity in this section to flesh out a framework for examining the *critical terrorism researcher* in the substantive part of this article. Recent critiques of terrorism and counter-terrorism have illustrated the colonial underpinnings of the discourses and practices associated with these categories whether in relation to how they reinforce and sustain power and different forms of domination, as well as the effects of these on different communities (Chukwuma 2022b; Abu-Bakare 2020; McQuade 2020; see also Mogbolu 2024; Khan, 2024; Heike 2024). McQuade (2020, 17), for instance, has shown how the category of terrorism was re-invented by the League of Nations in 1937 to manage global crime and anti-colonial movements around the world, which purportedly posed a threat to state sovereignty and Western civilisation. Contemporary counter-terrorism practices, which are fundamentally legitimised or enabled by the category of terrorism, are intricately linked to the theory and practice of counterinsurgency which ultimately seeks to maintain or extend an existing social order through force, coercion and other techniques (McCulloch and Pickering 2005).

While identifying the much-needed input from a "decolonial approach" to (critical) terrorism studies, decolonial analysis has, however, highlighted the difficulty of "decolonising" the field itself. According to Khan (2021, 499), "we cannot decolonise Terrorism Studies, a discipline that is colonial, has had colonial intentions, functions and implications." Thus, Khan (2021) emphasises that, "we therefore cannot 'decolonise' CTS as its existence, to a very substantial degree, is dependent on (Orthodox) Terrorism Studies given that it emerged in response and as a response to it." As this indicates, the context in

which CTS (researchers) emerged, and continue to thrive within, is shaped by colonial imaginings, and ways of being and knowing, despite its commitment to a "critical" scholarship. Along such a decolonial attitude to terrorism research, I draw upon insights from important works on coloniality and identity in decolonial scholarship to examine the production of the *critical terrorism researcher* within systems of domination, exclusions, and exploitation.

Decolonial scholars have consistently highlighted the connection between the tripartite forms of colonial domination: the coloniality of power; the coloniality of being; and the coloniality of knowledge. As summarised by Maldonado-Torres (2007, 252):

> While the coloniality of power refer to the interrelation among modern forms of exploitation and domination, the coloniality of knowledge point to the impact of colonization on the different areas of knowledge production, and finally, the coloniality of being makes primary reference to the lived experience of colonization and its varied impacts.

In this article, though, I focus, analytically, on the coloniality of being and explore how this intersects with knowledge production and power. This is important because, any attempt to unsettle the coloniality of power will (should) inevitably call for the dismantling of terrorism discourses and those structures and practices that perpetuate or sustain them. According to Maldonado-Torres (2007), the coloniality of being is not a natural outcome of the dynamics of creation of (the) meaning (of being Human). Rather, it is always present as a possibility and "shows itself forth when the preservation of Being in its various forms, including identitarian ontologies, takes primacy over listening to other voices", and frameworks (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 257).

Sylvia Wynter provides an extremely relevant conceptualisation of the relationship between the coloniality of being, power, truth and freedom, which informs my approach in this article. In exposing the ethical implications of the European colonial project underpinned by two "descriptive statements of the Human" (theo-centric and juridico-political conceptions of Man), Wynter refashions the ontological argument about what it means to be human – or being human in the modern world – by foregrounding the otherwise veiled link between race, gender, class and sexuality which legitimises domination and exploitation. Wynter "refuses to embrace the entity of the Human independently of the epistemic categories and concepts that created it and thus describes colonial domination as an autopoietic system" (Wynter as quoted by Mignolo in McKittrick 2015, 108). Put simply, "western epistemology built itself on a concept of Human [defined as White/Western/bourgeoisie/heterosexual Man] and Humanity that, in turn, served to legitimize the epistemic foundations that it created". This construction of Man vis-à-vis the politics of being human is "dependent on a new 'space of Otherness' which functions to validate the socio-ontological line between rational, political Man and its irrational Human Others" (S. Wynter 2003, 314). It is this new master code, according to S. Wynter (2003, 323), that would come to operate at all levels of the social order, in relation to class, gender, sexual orientation, superior/inferior ethnicities, and so on.

Quijano (2007), similar to Wynter's formulation above, notes that the colonial matrix of power refers to the geographical, political and onto-epistemological extensions of western domination, particularly in the economic, political, gender/sexuality, and knowledge domains. While one does not feel and experience coloniality in the same way or level, the colonial matrix highlights the different, layered and inter-connected workings of colonial

domination (Mignolo as cited in McKittrick 2015, 115). The problem of the Human is not exactly identity-based per se, but in the enunciation of what it means to be Human – or, as adapted here, what it means to be a (critical) terrorism researcher/expert – which is a product of a particular [Western] epistemology (McKittrick 2015, 108). Indeed, the relationship between power and identity is exceptionally complex and typically functions in a non-linear manner where power constructs identity, and identity, in turn, defines or reinforces power and domination. It is also worth mentioning, as Moya (2011) points out, that identity is not a prison but rather a point of departure that allows us to observe, understand, and question particular aspects of the world (including CTS agendas and research practices). However, since all modern identities "are largely a construction of the coloniality of power within the modern/colonial world, their defense is not as subversive as it might seem at first" (Grosfoguel 2011, 30). In light of these complementary perspectives, I draw upon Wynter's articulation of the link between coloniality and the conception of Man (as Human) to examine the production of a specific idea of the *critical terrorism researcher*.

A branch of CTS as described in the previous section aims to elaborate a reflexive discourse about "terrorism", especially in relation to emancipation. Such a perspective is, however, embedded within Western modernity, and reproduces within its domains of thought (and practices) certain descriptive statements and the idea of an imagined critical researcher (reflective, reflexive, emancipator), in relation to certain "others" (those labelled as "terrorists", Orthodox terrorism scholars, Muslim communities, the global South, among others). Specifically, this universalist discourse of emancipation, as well as certain research practices often based on progressive politics (e.g. promoting alternative counter-terrorism policies, developing research designs and questions according to specific priorities and frameworks, offering "expert" knowledge on terrorisms) essentially contributes to reinforcing Western hegemony and other oppressive structures that perpetuate terrorism discourses in the first place. In contrast to this view, any critical engagement with "terrorism", I argue, must ultimately work towards dismantling it, along with the structures (and practices) that enable or sustain it.

As Chambers and Buzinde (2015) point out, decolonising research and knowledge production does not simply occur with the inclusion of "others", including those with different theoretical and political orientations/agendas, and systems of thought into mainstream or critical discourse. Moreover (critical), terrorism researchers have been predominantly trained within a specific Eurocentric intellectual space and the field itself is underpinned by a range of colonial, racist and gendered assumptions and frameworks. Thus, the cross-cultural production and dissemination of knowledge is (still) largely governed by these prevailing colonial paradigms, including the category of "terrorism" (Khan 2021; Khan 2024; Wright 2024; Meier 2024; Schotten 2024). The act of epistemic and intellectual decolonisation, therefore, entails a complex, disruptive process that requires a fundamental shift which moves away from facile binaries and assumptions (critical/orthodox, activist/mimic, terrorism/counter-terrorism, west/other) to new frames of reference, imaginings, and decolonial subjectivities.

By de-centring the *critical terrorism researcher* as, chiefly, a model of Man (usually western/white/bourgeoise) I render more visible the epistemic as well as material forces that shape the production of such a researcher-identity in relation to coloniality and the kind of expertise or knowledge it produces. I also highlight possible openings for

articulating resistance to "terrorism" which moves beyond terrorism studies. In the sections that follows, I reflect on my own research practice in light of my choices, interests, ambitions, emotions, encounters, and of course, crucial national, regional, gendered, and ethnic identities. This includes an examination of my recent work published on the theme of (counter-)terrorism, as well as conversations with research participants and others during field research in Nigeria in 2020, which was related to my doctoral research in which I examined Nigeria's counter-terrorism policy. As noted in the introduction, the aim here is not to revise or update the arguments developed in my previous works as I still stand by most of these, especially regarding the coercive/militaristic design of recent counter-terrorism practices in Nigeria. Rather, this reflection seeks to contribute to wider critique of, and resistance to, "terrorism" and the structures that sustain it.

The captive being

> Like the clergy intellectuals then, now it is the intellectuals of Man who "own the Word," while, like the pre-Renaissance lay intellectuals, it is the "native" intellectuals (and postcolonially speaking, the intellectuals of the subordinated and economically impoverished world) who now have only the use of Mans Word, who therefore can only "echo." That is, who must think, write, and prescribe policies, however oppositionally so, in the terms of the very biocentric paradigms that prescribe the subordination and impoverishment of the vast majority of the worlds to which they/we belong; since paradigms elaborated in the very terms of the descriptive statement of the human, in whose logic the non-Western, non-white peoples can only, at best, be assimilated as honorary humans … (S. Wynter 2003, 329)

The following section conceptualises critique as a form of colonial captivity by drawing upon the theoretical framework outlined in the previous section. Alatas (1972) used the notion of the "captive mind" to describe Asian social scientists and the supposedly wholesome adoption of dominant Euro-centric ideas in the field of development and architectural design. Similarly, Wa Thiong'o's (1986) renowned work on "decolonizing the mind", in which he examined the continuing impacts of colonialism in Africa, also points to the mind as the centre of the struggle against colonial domination. According to Wa Thiong'o (1986, 16), the "domination of a people's language by the language of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised." Therefore, he noted, the colonial [child] was made to see the world and where he stands in it as seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the language of imposition" (Wa Thiong'o 1986, 17). Taking cues from these insightful works on the link between coloniality and captivity, I examine the ways in which my own lived experience as a researcher from the global South involved in the production of knowledge about (counter-)terrorism is fundamentally shaped by colonial imaginings, epistemologies and practices.

My foray into critical scholarship on terrorism (coming from a neo-realist background in International Relations which I was introduced to alongside other mainstream IR theories during my Master's degree at the University of Hull) began during my doctoral studies at the University of East Anglia, Norwich. Among the key texts that greatly stimulated my curiosity and paved the way for my introduction to, and subsequent relationship with, Critical Terrorism Studies was Lee Jarvis' article entitled "The spaces and faces of Critical Terrorism Studies", which was published in 2009 in *Security Dialogue* Journal (see Jarvis 2009). I should also state here that Lee was my PhD Supervisor and my engagement with

his work and discourse about "terrorism" was mostly self-inspired. However, this snowballed into a conversation – which started in my mind – with Lee and the CTS community, continuing for most of my doctoral studies. The broadly constructivist approach espoused in CTS scholarship, which contrasts significantly with the neo-realist and rationalist paradigms that informed my earlier intellectual contemplations, was indeed a key anchor during these stages of development. Even though I found CTS and the stream of approaches therein fascinating and innovative, I was dissatisfied with the lack of contribution from postcolonial scholarship to CTS research project and the overwhelming reference to 9/11 in developing its critique which often overlooked other forms of violence and systems of oppression before and after 9/11, such as imperialist and colonial violence.

Thus, in my article entitled "Critical Terrorism Studies and Postcolonialism", published in the Critical Studies on Terrorism journal, I argued for "building connections [between CTS and postcolonial theory], one that enhances the potential for fruitful engagement in the areas of power, representation, perspectives and critiques of modernity" (Chukwuma 2022b, p. 403). Noting that,

> As much as CTS seeks to contribute to broadening and deepening knowledge about (counter-)terrorism, postcolonialism, I argue, extends this research enterprise in at least two significant ways: first, is by enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the complex histories, relationships and interconnections embedded in, and reinforced through, counter-terrorism discourses and practices. Second, and relatedly, it moves CTS beyond its narrow entrapment in post-9/11 counter-discourse by providing other temporalities that account for earlier, recent, and continuing discourses of (counter-)terrorism. (Chukwuma 2022b, p. 403)

The above observation indeed calls for the "broadening" of the discourse around "terrorism" ostensibly to recognise, and in so doing, include other forms of violence (colonial/imperialist in this case). This aspiration is indeed in consonance with the inclusionist tendencies in CTS as described earlier in this article rather than, say, a move towards the outright rejection of "terrorism". The article itself seeks to highlight the continuing effects of colonialism in Nigeria's war on terror and the implications of this for social and political life in Nigeria. Even though it generally advocates for progressive policies (which I am still convinced about) and seeks to draw attention to important issues related to the peculiarities of the Nigerian context, the article ultimately aims to broaden the scope and discourse on counter-terrorism by spotlighting "other" experiences and geographies of violence which are supposedly ignored in (critical) terrorism research.

The implications of the arguments developed in the above-discussed article became apparent upon reflection during, and after, my fieldwork in Abuja, Nigeria in 2020. I conducted archival research as part of my doctoral project which includes visits to the key government ministries, departments, and agencies involved in the formulation of Nigeria's counter-terrorism policy (including the Ministry of Defence; Ministry of Justice; the Office of the National Security Adviser; and the Ministry of Interior). As described elsewhere (see Chukwuma 2022a), my identity was constructed in three important ways which shaped the research process and fieldwork significantly: academic-researcher; Nigerian-Igbo; and Nigerian-diaspora. The first construction of my identity, as an academic-researcher, is relevant for my reflection here as this positioned me as a threat to the state and, at the same time, a potential source of policy recommendation or advice. It is

important to note, though, that this construction of academic-researcher intersected with my gendered, racial, class and ethnic identities which had significant implications for gaining access to the above-mentioned government sites (Chukwuma 2022a). According to an official at the Ministry of Justice, the reluctance to release "sensitive" documents to academics or researchers is because "they are typically used (by researchers) to malign the state".[12] I was, however, invited to offer suggestions on how to improve state policies as a "Western-trained expert". At this point, I thought they had not read, or are not familiar with, the kind of "critical" work that I do – I was wrong. The state official explained: "you can criticise the government as a researcher, but you could do it in a way that offers useful alternatives, solutions and recommendations to improve government policies" (Chukwuma 2022a, p. 450).

The merging of critique and terrorism expertise is of course not unique and reflects earlier discussions in this article, particularly those related to the activist-scholar identity of the *critical terrorism researcher*. Underpinning this researcher identity as noted above is a normative pledge to emancipation, which usually takes different albeit problematic forms, including supporting or proposing alternative policies. This encounter with the state officials in Nigeria highlights a crucial problem associated with the framework of terrorism, whether used critically or otherwise. "Terrorism" inevitably refers to a particular type of threat facing the state (as well as Western modernity more generally) and provides justifications for counter-terrorism. Thus, the production of the (critical) terrorism researcher and expert through the descriptive statement of "critique" (defined according to reflexivity and inclusivity) functions as an invitation to engage with(in) these racialised/gendered/and colonial categories that inevitably enable the prioritisation of the Nigerian state and related interests.

I declined the above request for policy recommendations, however, after much contemplation on what my research priorities entail. Even though I felt privileged to be invited into such spaces and for being granted audience with key policymakers in Nigeria, this encounter left me with a growing sense of dissatisfaction and questions about what it means to do "critical" research and the implications of "terrorism" in shaping research (and identity). While my own approach to terrorism and counter-terrorism, which draws upon poststructuralism and postcolonial theory, is not explicitly underscored by a normative pledge to emancipation as elaborated by the Frankfurt School-inspired CTS, it nonetheless enables certain seemingly progressive assumptions and practices that contribute to the over-representation of "terrorism". The continued use of "terrorism" as an analytical framework or heuristic – which could be stretched, and perhaps, adapted to non-western contexts – in my own work energises it further, instead of stressing its irredeemability (see Khan 2024). Importantly, such an approach implicitly or otherwise portrays postcolonial societies or the global South as a missing link in the contemporary academic discourse about "terrorism" and seeks to foreground how the legacies of colonialism shape counter-terrorism in these contexts (in the hope that such a recognition of, and engagement with, the postcolonial dimension of counter-terrorism will inform better policies and contribute to knowledge in this area).

This tension between critique and complicity in terrorism research was further illuminated in my encounter with an uber driver who took me to the government ministries in Abuja, Nigeria, during fieldwork. After a few visits to these sites, he asked what my research was about and why I was specifically interested in these state ministries. I

explained the focus and methodology of my doctoral project. But he seemed uninterested or found it, somewhat, uninteresting. During one of our daily trips, he said: "I hope that your fieldwork progresses smoothly and that you are able to complete your dissertation; but, in the future, you could focus more on the Nigerian society and the numerous challenges it faces."[13] Pointing out of the window of his car to a police officer beating pedestrians with a baton, he continued, "why don't you write about these sorts of things: about the daily violence and hardship that Nigerians experience."[14] Of course, his views may differ considerably from the perspectives of those in north-eastern Nigeria, especially in those places engulfed by the violence created by Boko Haram insurgency and state-led counter-terrorism intervention. However, I tried to explain my approach – and justifications for using the "terrorism" frame in my own research – which is attentive to state brutality and other forms of violence, as well as my commitment to reflexive research. In other words, *genuine* critical research on terrorism entails being reflective about the discourses and assumptions that underpin "terrorism", and thus, prioritising other spaces and concerns in my analysis including issues related to colonialism, I assumed. However, I realised that such an approach to critical research which does not explicitly call for, or look towards, the discarding of "terrorism" may unwittingly contribute to its recycling and normalisation, following these encounters during fieldwork as well as numerous engagements with various research communities and groups.[15]

To conclude, this section has tried to conceptualise the critique of "terrorism" as indeed a form of colonial captivity through the examination of my own research and fieldwork in Nigeria. Captivity in these instances and encounters was essentially enabled by my desire to expand or re-articulate terrorism discourses in relation to new "spaces of otherness" (postcolonial/Africa/global South), as well as my positioning as a western-trained researcher/expert involved in the colonial economy of knowledge production about counter-terrorism in Nigeria and prescribing policy remedy albeit in seemingly critical terms (in light of the threat posed by terrorism against the Nigerian state, liberal democracy, development and other modernisation projects). As explained above, even though the notion of emancipation does not specifically underpin my own research objectives and theoretical orientations, my engagement with "terrorism" (research) invariably shares certain similarities with such normative research tendencies (i.e. inclusion, reformist policies, and most importantly, the over-representation of "terrorism").

The language of critique

The importance of language is central in decolonial thought especially for uncovering the differential workings of coloniality in the production of categories and hierarchies in the modern/colonial world order. For Fanon, "to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language; but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (Fanon 2017, 17–18). A similar perspective concerning the link between language and the coloniality of knowledge was conceptualised more elaborately by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986), with regard to colonial domination and strategies of exclusion through the distinction between the "imperialist/western language" and the "resistance/suppressed languages". Truth claims about the world, according to Wa Thiong'o (1986), are expressed specially through the dominant, Western language and systems of thought imbibed with various symbols, images,

meanings, and aesthetics. The politics of language was described by Wynter as sociogenic in that it entails a social process of *doing* language, and how we come to know and describe the modern world (S. Wynter 1992). This link between language and coloniality highlights the ways in which Western epistemologies and frameworks (including terrorism, counter-terrorism, and emancipation) condition the possibility of imagination and resistance, including in critical scholarship.

My article on "CTS and Postcolonialism" indeed highlights a specific way of writing (or speaking) about counter-terrorism in certain contexts that is deemed to be exceptional, obscure or complex. Specifically, exploring the "postcolonial" dimension of Nigeria's counter-terrorism discourse helps to "highligh[t] wider, colonial, and imperialistic ideas and practices inherent within the evolving official counter-terrorism discourse, which intersect with other Eurocentric and state-centred narratives" (Chukwuma 2022b, p. 402). Among the key objectives in the article include to account for the specificities of Nigeria especially in relation to colonialism and to incorporate this within a modern/global discourse about (counter-)terrorism by,

> Approaching Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy as a discursive, political activity contributing to the production of identity by designating "ungoverned" spaces in north-east Nigeria and the LCB. It highlights constructions – and contestation – of Nigeria's (colonial) territorial boundary, as well as the intricacies underpinning its identity and the relationship between knowledge and power in the Nigerian context. While Nigerian counter-terrorism discourse reinvigorates common Eurocentric and state-centred narratives, these, however, overlap and highlight other important discourses. (Chukwuma 2022b, p. 405)

The language and aim of broadening "terrorism", which is implied above, though relevant for understanding the complexities of Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy and its various impacts, unwittingly produce new forms of colonial domination, exploitation, and difference. The epistemic, material, and symbolic functions of language in the context of terrorism research often involve the use of different grammars and frameworks in addressing a target audience (academic, policy, Western, and funding bodies) for various purposes, including to contribute to the body of knowledge about terrorism and counter-terrorism, for academic recognition or promotion, to secure big research grants, to inform or change state policy, to publish in a specific academic journal or discussion, and so on. Among the key motivations and aims of my article is the examination of the official discourse around counter-terrorism Nigeria, using this as an entry point into the wider debates around terrorism and counter-terrorism. This, however, encourages an extractive system whereby knowledge about – instead of against – "terrorism" is mined for global consumption, which is often regulated by academic journal paywalls.

Such forms of exploitation are not new, or specific to terrorism research. However, this has far-reaching ramifications for knowledge production and dissemination. On the one hand, writing about counter-terrorism in this way confines knowledge production and circulation within certain embargoed, colonised spaces which forestall wider scrutiny, contestation, or abolition, of "terrorism". There is, however, an increased attention and support for more open access work and interventions from independent artists, activists, and community organisers (Yomantas 2020). On the other hand, writing about counter-terrorism from a "critical" standpoint often suggests a progressive, Western/liberal ethos, or the commitment to certain ideals about social justice which often ignores the different

forms, material drivers and consequences of political violence in different geopolitical contexts. Put differently, how and why we write about "terrorism", as well as who we write for is crucial for undoing the impacts of coloniality in knowledge production and dissemination. These dilemmas and the limitations of my own work were, again, illuminated in my fieldwork encounters with state officials and other individuals as discussed below.

The state officials at the government ministries that I visited during fieldwork frequently referred to the lack of education, unemployment, and poverty in north-eastern Nigeria as major drivers of terrorism, which of course serve as justifications for counter-terrorism. However, I was (and still remain) unconvinced about such perspectives or assumptions not least because the link between terrorism and poverty has not been sufficiently established in contemporary research on political violence (Botha and Abdile 2019). I was also worried about the impacts of counter-terrorism interventions on the communities in this region based on these assumptions. As such, I tried to pose a different set of questions than those related to the causes or drivers of those violences framed as "terrorism" to help them think differently, and perhaps, see the limitations of their approach or policy choices. The state officials appreciated the insights generated by our conversations but repeatedly asked a similar question, which was often posed in different ways: "what should we do about the socio-economic and socio-political problems in the north-east?" Even though counter-terrorism is typically conflated with other policy areas or issues for various (political) reasons, the language – and aims – of critique as noted above inevitably reinforce these categories (terrorism and counter-terrorism), leading to different outcomes including the invitation to provide expert knowledge to improve state policy, or a call to dismantle oppressive structures. Indeed, terrorism discourses fundamentally shape, and condition, knowledge on social and political life by prioritising certain actors and their interests, notwithstanding one's commitment to critical research.

There are, though, various innovative research methodologies in terrorism research that seek to prioritise the perspectives of non-state actors. Nevertheless, these approaches often end up reinforcing most of the problems and assumptions associated with the terrorism label especially with regard to references to the state as the primary security actor or as a source of insecurity. As my encounter with the Uber driver during my fieldwork shows, "terrorism" evokes a specific idea about the threat and geography of violence (Boko Haram and north-eastern Nigeria as havens for terrorists) as well as those responsible for providing security (the Nigerian state, through its ministries and agencies). At the same time, it occludes other forms of violence especially those experienced daily by the population (police brutality, economic hardship, insecurity). Explaining my own approach to "terrorism" purportedly to justify my research objectives, as well as to build connections and show politeness left the Uber driver (like the state official) discontented and baffled. He wondered why I had to go through such an intellectual exercise to explain (counter-)terrorism instead of speaking about, or using other frames such as, violence, brutality, and the like. Moreover, this endeavour to explain – or justify the use of – "terrorism" through a purportedly critical lens may enable the imposition of certain views and ideas, especially considering crucial class/racial/and gendered aspects of my identity (i.e. Western-educated man).

Furthermore, my scepticism of the discursive claims about the drivers or causes of terrorism in Nigeria may potentially devalue the pertinent issues facing communities in the north-east and other parts of Nigeria (including poverty, illiteracy, unemployment,

among other socio-economic problems). Critiques of state violence in relation to emancipation as discussed earlier often make universalist claims about humanity and the identity of the *critical terrorism researcher*. This creates a dilemma of how to attend to these structural, social and political problems without being prescriptive, and certainly, without referring back to the framework of "terrorism". In sum, languages, as Mignolo (2015) notes, are not something human beings have but rather a constitutive part of their identity and epistemic reference points. Thus, the coloniality of power, and of knowledge, continuously shapes the development and operationalisation of seemingly counter-hegemonic discourses, including those formulated by so-called critical terrorism researchers. The language of critique (of "terrorism") is therefore part and parcel of the identity of the *critical terrorism researcher* and as such central to the preservation of systems of oppression and colonial domination. It contributes to the over-representation of terrorism and is fundamentally shaped by certain Western/imperialist/statist/bourgeoise/and gendered codes and interests, which reinforces colonial difference and domination. The critique of "terrorism" could therefore be seen as a way of writing or languaging, according to colonial grammars and epistemologies, which enables the production of the *critical terrorism researcher* as well as those subjects and audiences spoken to, for, or about.

The practice of reflexivity

The concluding remark in my article regarding the potential contribution of postcolonial thought to CTS project hints at the possibility of developing alternative vocabularies, and liberatory futures:

> First, is the possibility to develop alternative vocabularies for explaining both terrorism and counter-terrorism in different contexts. This is especially relevant in the context of new and emerging frameworks deployed in terrorism research after 9/11, such as "extremism" and "radicalization", which largely reinforce problematic western bias, blindsight and assumptions. (Chukwuma 2022b, p. 412)

The above is important for thinking about reflexivity in my own research practice, and development as an early-career academic (especially because it was a moot point and was mostly underdeveloped) due to the (problematic) objectives, language and frameworks used in my article as discussed in previous sections. This focus on research practice raises several pertinent questions: how can (critical) terrorism researchers practice reflexivity in spite of, or within, colonial captivity?; what are the implications on the subjectivities of reflexivity in researching (counter-)terrorism within such systems of domination?; and finally, how can we form alternative practices (and discourses) to break hegemonic relations and reality? Reflexivity is indeed a prominent theme discussed within CTS and forms an important part of its commitment to "ethically normative research" (see Sjoberg 2024). Bringing the researchers' biases to light has been described as a crucial way for CTS scholars to continuously reflect on their position as knowledge producers, in relation to the claims they make about terrorism and counter-terrorism. Yet, as Russell-Mundine (2012) notes, this form of self-scrutiny, especially without actively engaging in the dismantling of the systems of (Western) domination, can lead to complacency; that is, reviewing and learning from the past without disassembling and liberating oneself (from "terrorism" and the epistemic, material, and symbolic forces that shape or nurture it).

In the context of terrorism research, which, as I have argued above, is a fundamentally colonial and imperialist undertaking in that it fosters the continued engagement with – instead of without – "terrorism", the practice of reflexivity is inexorably impacted by the colonial design of the field and spaces in which knowledge production and dissemination take place. The colonial marketplace of terrorism knowledge production and consumption, which involves different experts, policy practitioners, the media, academics, technospaces, to a larger extent, shapes or undermines how we *do* reflexivity. This may be subjected to many hurdles, including (1) the researcher's ability and willingness to scrutinise and situate the self, along with the dominant systems of oppression (especially for those senior or renowned researchers/experts in the field of terrorism studies); and (2) accommodating reflections about our position in relation to knowledge production without becoming too introspective and detached from the broader goal of dismantling Western hegemony. Tweaking our research methods and tinkering with colonial/Western epistemologies in (critical) terrorism research ostensibly to promote an emancipatory, inclusive, accountable, and reflexive research should not be mistaken for calls to "decolonise" – neither can terrorism research be decolonial or decolonised. As argued throughout this article, adopting a critical attitude or orientation that is essentially concerned with *learning* and *doing* terrorism research better reinforces the very thing it should, I argue, ultimately seek to abolish: "terrorism" (see Khan in 2024). Thus, a decolonial approach to reflexivity suggests the interrogation, and dismantling, of structures and systems of domination, exploitation, exclusions, as well as our relationship to them in knowledge production.

Indigenous researchers have continued to chart useful ways in which an ethical research project that is critical, liberating, and aims to decolonise knowledge production and dissemination can be imagined and practiced (Tuhiwai Smith 2005; Russell-Mundine 2012; Tangihaere and Twiname 2011). Prominent among these, as described by Tuhiwai Smith (2005), include community action projects and talking circles which seek to educate, respect, elevate, and heal differentially. My research trajectory has indeed benefited from the generosity of communities that I engage and learn from, which are, of course, committed to the struggle against capitalist/racist/colonial/imperialist/and patriarchal structures. I have also paid keen attention to the concerns and vocabularies used by those communities and individuals I encounter in the course of my research journey to make sense of (their) reality which, as I showed above with regard to the Uber driver during my fieldwork in Nigeria, are fundamentally different from those espoused by state officials or academics. Thus, moving beyond accountability politics and the terrorism frame, I am increasingly interested in exploring different questions related to violence, resistance, and resilience. More specifically, I am interested in those questions that emanate from – or circulate within – "the margins" of society, as well as in crucial questions about our modern world, and learning from these questions without overformulating them into terrorism research (scientific and methodologically rigorous, attractive to research funders or policy relevant) (Russell-Mundine 2012).

As discussed during the two-day EISA Workshop around the meaning of critique,[16] the future of Critical Terrorism Studies will be birthed through such an imaginative and collective endeavour, through developing alternative, counter-hegemonic grammars to make sense of our colonial present and foster a pluriversal world (Mignolo 2011). Such an imaginative exercise, however, must be unencumbered by disciplinary boundary,

interests, and biases. The importance of a transdisciplinary approach cannot be over-emphasised, as we must re-imagine the world collaboratively and differentially, including by engaging more productively with communities outside the field of terrorism and academic research (https://www.faisalhussain.com/about/). To conclude here, reflexive research practices within a colonial system of domination, regardless of whatever critical attitude we might employ, will continue to be haunted by questions concerning complicity, captivity, and more increasingly, the eradication of the category of terrorism and practices that sustain it (counter-terrorism, academic journal paywalls, terrorism expertise, terrorism courses and training programmes, among others). The future of CTS therefore is to contribute to abolishing terrorism and the structures that produced it in the first instance.

Conclusion: on the master's tools, and dismantling the master's house

The study of terrorism has indeed attracted various experts, knowledge communities, researchers and approaches from a diversity of disciplines, often, with a shared purpose of analysing the complexity of "terrorism" and related forms of violence. The vast body of work around "terrorism" has generated invaluable insights particularly those from anthropology, psychology and related disciplines, much of which has informed or enriched recent critiques of (counter-)terrorism (Zulaika and Douglass 1996; Silke 2003). CTS emerged as a response to the way in which "terrorism" was (and is still) studied and the assumptions about (counter-)terrorism developed in Terrorism Studies. In taking a quasi-foundationalist approach, a strand of CTS seeks to foster an inclusive and emancipatory practice in terrorism research domain, which is often shaped by Western universalist principles and human rights injunctions. Through the critique of "terrorism" ostensibly for scholar-activist endeavours, this current within CTS aims to re-purpose the discourses around terrorism including through moving away from the negative essentialist connotations that underpin contemporary uses of "terrorism", to free those – wrongly – victimised and exploited by various structures or systems of oppression. These are noble ambitions, at face value, which are somewhat linked to wider concerns for social justice, equality, and human rights.

That said, terrorism research – both Orthodox and Critical currents – is paradoxically aided and abetted by the same thing that it set out to investigate, explain, or problematise: terrorism. As such, CTS scholarship is inevitably shaped by certain ideas (and practices) linked to "terrorism" which, as noted above, is characterised by various colonial, imperialist, and gendered assumptions. While these frameworks and ideas (including emancipation) are often used for various purposes deemed to be progressive, and anti-hegemonic, they highlight certain contradictions in critical research on terrorism, including the persistent focus on elite or official discourses, the universalist claims about emancipation or what it means to be human in the modern world, prescriptive research tendencies through providing "expert" knowledge about the different manifestations of terrorism (state terrorism, right and left-wing extremist violence, religious terrorism, and so on). As Black, lesbian, feminist writer and activist, Audre Lorde pointed out, "the master's tools may temporarily allow us to beat [him] at his game, but they will never inspire genuine change" (Lorde 2017, 19) The over-attentiveness to, and over-representation of, "terrorism" as I have argued in this article, whether used for progressive aims or

otherwise, inevitably reinforces various epistemic and material structures that perpetuate domination (state, Western liberal ideas and values, the (critical) terrorism researcher or expert, colonised academic spaces). This, in turn, forecloses the practice of a truly liberatory project; one that is fundamentally grounded in counter-hegemonic, anti-imperialist and anti-racist thought, and committed to dismantling structures of oppression and domination.

Such an analysis against "terrorism" must, of course, reflect on the obvious and remote implications it entails. Indeed, the study of terrorism involves a huge ideological and material investment (and labour) upheld by various interests, from the numerous university modules, textbooks and academic journals on terrorism, to academic careers, conferences, research grants awarded for the study of terrorism. In addition to these concerns, there are other instrumentalist or problem-solving justifications too, which might make such an analysis against the discourse of "terrorism" and its co-ordinates seem, somewhat, irrational, abstract, or even, immoral. After all, the violence, labelled as "terrorism", committed by different state and non-state actors is real, and certainly deadly, often leading to mass loss of life and property. Thus, abolishing terrorism, along with the practices that underpin and sustain it, will not in itself resolve these issues; neither is my aim in this article to prescribe an alternative to "terrorism". As discussed above, the future of (critical) terrorism research and "what comes after" terrorism will involve an exercise of imagining new and different ways of being and knowing, as well as resistance to colonial/imperialist systems of domination and exclusion. This will create much-needed space for asking new questions about the different manifestations of violence and insecurity, and how they re-configure social and political existence.

Thus, CTS could engage more frequently with, and learn from, different intellectual and activist movements that are committed to anti-imperialist ideologies and praxis, such as the various decolonisation and abolitionist movements taking place within and outside the academy (see Marquez and Rana 2017; including Muslim Abolitionist Futures, Nejma Collective, and similar community oriented organisations). The purpose of such an engagement, though, should not be directed towards improving terrorism studies or doing *critique* better, in the form of "decolonial terrorism studies" or "abolitionist terrorism studies" for example, which may lead to the co-optation of these critical sensibilities; thus, undermining their critical edge and the liberatory possibilities they present. Rather, such an engagement should ultimately lead to the undoing of "terrorism" and everything that props it up, including the field of terrorism studies and terrorism expertise.

Notes

1. This article is inspired by numerous conversations with colleagues, mentors, supervisors, interlocutors, students, research participants, and many others. These interactions, however, point to broader concerns in Critical Terrorism Studies especially with regard to knowledge production and research practices in this sub-field as noted during a roundtable discussion at the British International Studies Association 2023 annual conference, and a subsequent workshop at the European Workshops in International Studies in July 2023 around the theme of critique in relation to CTS.
2. This article highlights the production of "terrorism" through discourse, and other meaningful practices. Rather than an objective, neutral or extra-discursive phenomenon, the origins and reproduction of "terrorism" (discourses) is fundamentally shaped by colonial, racist, and

gendered assumptions including those about the "perpetrators" of violence, whilst preserving state interests, whiteness, and Western modernity.

3. The emphasis on the impacts of coloniality and the need to dismantle – or de-link from – the material and epistemic groundings of colonial domination distinguish the decolonial approach from other critical orientations, including postcolonial perspectives, which share similar concerns about the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, the global North and the global South. This distinction is indeed important for examining and reflecting on my research interests and practices, as well as the arguments developed in this article.
4. I am deeply grateful to Rabea Khan for her useful comments on an earlier draft of this article, and for pointing me to key decolonial literature, including Wynter's work.
5. Many thanks to Laura Sjoberg for her insight on the relationship between critique and complicity.
6. I use the heuristics of "activist-scholar" and "mimic" to explore two seemingly contrasting ideas of the CTS researcher, highlighting various ideas and criticisms of CTS research agenda.
7. I use "more-critical" Terrorism Studies here to describe those studies located outside CTS (and its Orthodox counterpart) that are attentive to the implications of the discourse of terrorism including in relation to colonialism, race, and racism.
8. While Gunning's idea of inclusivity refers specifically to terrorism studies and the different currents within it, other scholars including those identified here define inclusion in relation to certain emancipatory goals.
9. Indeed, Gunning emphasised the implications of the continued use of the "terrorism" frame in his intervention, without necessarily calling for its outright rejection.
10. Sylvia Wynter's idea of overrepresentation highlights how hegemonic categories (and violent structures) are bolstered, maintained, or normalised. I use this concept throughout this article to illustrate how certain "critical" engagements with "terrorism" unwittingly contribute to its reification through engaging in discourses of emancipation.
11. I take cues from Sudipta Sen's work on the East India Company, to highlight the fluid networks, bodies, and spaces involved in the exploitative colonial economy of knowledge production, dissemination, and consumption in relation to "terrorism".
12. Field note, 14 March 2020
13. Field note, March 2020
14. Ibid
15. Many thanks to the contributors of this special issue who also participated in the EWIS workshop in 2023, for their insights and ideas around the critique of "terrorism".
16. This workshop was held between 13 and 14 July 2023.

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