

The Transdisciplinary Cluster Quest

A Research Poem

Melina C. Kalfelis

In a land of deep thought and empirical grind,
Where theory and praxis are tightly entwined,
A cluster of scholars, with visions quite grand,
Set off to the worlds of “Africa” at hand.

First came AM 1—so new and bold,
A place where concepts like “relationality” unfold.
“We’re grounded!” they cried, “Yet abstract as well!”
Though some simply nodded, too dazed to tell.

Multiplicity danced with a foot in each camp,
As heuristic angles lit up every lamp.
With whiteboards and coffee, debates would ignite—
“What is a relation?” (They argued all night.)

Next, in a corner more critical still,
sat ACC scholars, with epistemic will.
“Wanna study Africa?” they asked with a frown,
“Let’s unthink the map, epistemics upside-down!”

Fellows questioned their methods, their pay, and their shoes,
Their funding, their data, their peer-reviewed blues.
“Let’s decenter ourselves!” they declared with great vigor.
Then centered that thought on a panel with Rüdiger.

Then came AM 2, messy but keen,
A program of wonders, both nimble and green.
“Compare your approaches! Now stir in some flair!”
“Do we code with our hands, or theorize air?”
From fieldnotes to footnotes, from mud to machine,

They mixed up their methods and struggled for caffeine.
“Transdisciplinary!” they cheered in a huddle,
Then argued for weeks on the term’s subtle muddle.

So here stands the cluster, reflexive and wise,
With theoretical stars on postcolonial skies.
They will publish and ponder, will struggle and strive,
African Studies—you’re more than alive.