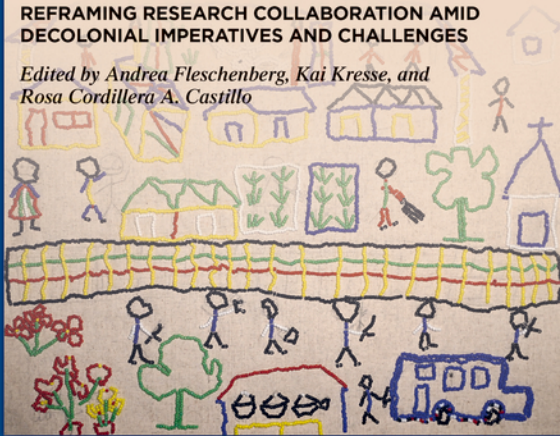


DE GRUYTER

THINKING WITH THE SOUTH

REFRAMING RESEARCH COLLABORATION AMID
DECOLONIAL IMPERATIVES AND CHALLENGES

*Edited by Andrea Fleschenberg, Kai Kresse, and
Rosa Cordillera A. Castillo*



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Thinking with the South

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Reframing Research Collaboration amid Decolonial
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Preface and Acknowledgements

This Open Access edited volume brings together a first series of revised discussion papers by scholars from a range of disciplinary, (trans)regional and epistemic perspectives that came out of our networking initiative *co²libri: conceptual collaboration – living borderless research interaction*, funded by the Berlin University Alliance (2020–2025). As an interdisciplinary and transregionally oriented initiative, *co²libri* envisages a multicentric perspective that integrates neglected positions of Southern theory and praxis into the heart of academic conversations. *co²libri*'s collaborative endeavour builds on long-standing active connections with partners in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Instead of setting an agenda from the North, it proposes to find ways forward through collaborative engagement, building on relationships of mutual trust. Using formats that facilitate substantial and open-ended discussion, we are rethinking theory and method, academic practices and research ethics, while keeping material inequalities in view.

Contributors to this edited volume are working towards the implementation of various innovative activities and collaboration formats which all subscribe to the principle of dialogue on equal footing with scholars and activists based in divergent positionalities along the global North–South divide and beyond. Authors are brought together in their aim to produce more adequate and more sensitive critical knowledge and to apply a fresh view to approach, methods and ethical standards. The group focuses on alternative frames of reference and theorizations of lived experiences. Thus, the various chapters add to our multi-layered, multi-disciplinary and transregional understandings, discussions and critical takes on the existing state of the art and its underlying practices. Subsequently, we aim to contribute to transformative understandings and practices of what it means to take an adequate position, and a constructive role, for scholars based in the global North and/or South or its interstices, within the current field of demands and expectations towards decolonising scholarship.

We would like to thank Lena Wassermeier and Nathalie A. Koenings for their meticulous and tireless efforts in finalising this manuscript. We also want to thank our colleagues in our *co²libri* networks as well as the members of the ZMO-based Working Group 'Thinkers and Theorizing from the South' who initiated, organized and engaged in the sessions of which the contributions to this volume are a testimony and whose critical discussions and sharing of their expertise enriched our reflections, including Chester Arcilla, Sandra Calkins, Fatima Castillo, Bettina Dennerlein, Claudia Derichs, Linda Chinenye Iroulo, Birgit Meyer, Juliana Tappe Ortiz, Antony Pattathu, June Rubis, Abdoulaye Sounaye, Abdulkader

Tayob, Ferdiansyah Thajib, Clod Yambao and others. We also thank the authors who engaged in rounds of mutual critical feedback on draft chapters. Furthermore, we would like to acknowledge the funding support we received from the Berlin University Alliance and thank our colleagues from the Berlin Center for Global Engagement (based at Freie Universität Berlin) for their support and interest in our co²libri activities. Thanks also go to our respective home institutions, the Institute of Asian and African Studies (IAAW) at Humboldt-University (HU) of Berlin, and the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO). This edited volume is just one outcome of these activities – many others are part of this journey and steps are already being taken to prepare a second co²libri volume publication.

Berlin, July 2023

The Editors



About the Cover Image

The cover image is a beadwork quilt panel made by internally displaced indigenous peoples from Mindanao, the Southern Philippines, who are collectively known as Lumad in collaboration with activist-researchers, civil society groups, and concerned citizens. They evacuated to Manila from 2019 to 2021 due to ongoing militarization in their ancestral lands. The Lumad 'bakwit' (evacuees) and their supporters assert evacuation as a collaborative creative work, a form of creative political action and platform for expressing and advancing their political grievances and democratic actions. These include their demand for basic social services, resistance against the militarisation and paramilitarisation, environmental plunder and encroachment of extractive and expansive industries such as mining, large-scale monocrop plantations, and logging on their ancestral domains, and protests against human rights violations and impunity. The presence of Lumad 'bakwits' in the city is a visual political reminder for the state of its failure to address the basic needs and rights of indigenous peoples.

The beadwork illustrates the lived experience of Lumad ‘bakwits’ at the evacuation camp during the “highly militarized”¹ hard lockdown. Divided by a wall that separates the collective organising of the ‘bakwit’ and the daily surveillance of the state, the middle and upper parts of the panel highlight the everyday activities at the evacuation camp: community urban gardening for food and medical purposes, sanitation, rituals, spiritual, social, and interfaith gatherings, and makeshift schools and clinics. The lower part of the panel, outside the camp, shows the everyday surveillance and intelligence activities. The presence of armed police and military and/or civilian intelligence surrounds the camp. Suspected state accomplices like street flower vendors and eatery vendors are portrayed as surveillance informants, and vehicles of state authorities are stationed.

Beadwork is part of the culture and everyday life activities of the Lumad. It serves as customary clothing ornaments, bodily adornments, leisurely pastimes, and sources of livelihood and artistic expression. The transfiguration of beadwork into a political form is their creative act that pushes back against their shrinking democratic spaces. As several Lumad artisans have shared:

“Kung nahuman na ang bakwit ug dili nami makita ug madunggan, mao ang among kabilin... matan-aw sa tibuok kalibutan... ang amua kahimtan ug kasinatian....”

(When evacuation ends and we can no longer be seen and heard, these works will be left... so the whole world will see our conditions and experiences.)

The colourful yet fragile beadwork, meticulously crafted, represents their unwavering position in defending their life and land.

The researcher is thankful to Ghent University Global Minds Operational Grant 2021, VLIR-UOS, and Belgium Partner in Development for making the collaborative project possible. The grant was awarded as part of his PhD research data gathering and field of engagement. Clod Marlan Krister V. Yambao was BUA-funded co²libri Early Career Fellow at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in 2022 where he presented and discussed selected parts of this beadwork art in co²libri workshop activities.

¹ Olanday, Dan, and Jennifer Rigby. “Inside the world’s longest and strictest coronavirus lockdown in the Philippines.” *Telegraph*, July 11, 2020. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/inside-worlds-longest-strictest-coronavirus-lockdown-philippines/>, accessed July 28, 2020.

Andrea Fleschenberg, Rosa Cordillera A. Castillo and Kai Kresse

Introduction: Reframing, Re-enacting Research and Collaboration

Too many contributions to knowledge, traditions of knowledge and individuals producing knowledge from marginalized regions in the so-called global South, but also from minoritarian and diasporic context locations both in the global North and in the global South, continue to be underappreciated in global scholarly conversations. Their contributions to theory building and emancipatory praxes are largely sidelined and barely circulate internationally – though things are beginning to change. This reflects the uneven geopolitics of knowledge production, which arguably is still skewed towards scholarship originating from the global North. This inequality is due to a combination of factors that include the uneven distribution of resources and publishing opportunities, but primarily Eurocentrism, which devalues if not erases or ignores epistemologies, bodies and praxes elsewhere. With urgent calls to decolonise academia, questions arise about how knowledge production could and should be conducted in order to redress existing imbalances and injustices, and their diverse means of perpetuation within current and ongoing structures. That is, there is a need to undo systems of higher education and research that have long been built on the seemingly certain pillars of Eurocentrism, with its underpinning hierarchical conceptions of human beings with whiteness at the top, and teleological models of human development in mind. There is, as Mbembe asserts, a “global Apartheid in Higher Education”¹ which needs to be overcome.

In short, Eurocentric knowledge producers and academic systems in both the global North and the global South do not give Southern thinkers, practitioners, practices and ideas the attention and exposure they deserve. On this basis, we seek to stimulate and cultivate serious, long-term and collaborative engagement in *thinking with the South*. This means to learn *with* Southern knowledge makers, to seriously engage with works and intellectual traditions as well as current critical interventions from non-Western and non-Europhone regions, in order to understand and shape alternative ways to navigate the world and address and tackle pressing global issues. This is done alongside incisive and continuous critique of the current global economy of knowledge production and its pervasive inequalities and exclusions and thinking through ways of undoing these inequalities and exclusions.

1 Mbembe 2016, 38.

Needless to say, frequently devalued contributions from marginalised places and positions are as crucial to knowledge of ‘the world,’ ‘human beings’ and ‘society’ as contributions from more recognized, hegemonic places of knowledge production. As decolonial, postcolonial and other critics have long argued, the dominance of conceptual and institutional Eurocentrism in global academia and knowledge production needs to be reined in and overcome.² Yet global progress on this front has been incremental and slow despite recent epistemic and equity debates related to the COVID-19 pandemic, global health and restitution, among others. Indeed, the larger project of rewriting and re-shaping the humanities and social sciences globally by integrating key references, arguments and contributors from the South as well as from minoritarian and diasporic context perspectives has only just begun. A key pathway here consists in arduous, empirically based work, thus fundamental research (*Grundlagenforschung*), that requires diverse kinds of inter-/disciplinary and linguistic expertise and can only be achieved by way of a collaborative, decentred approach across the so-called global North and South.

This volume emerges from the project *co²libri: conceptual collaboration – living borderless research interaction*, which assembles an interdisciplinary, transregionally oriented group of researchers and scholar-activists who have for many years pursued an inclusive and pluralising intellectual agenda, participating in decentred collaborative knowledge productions alongside their academic partners in many world regions. Building on these experiences, we – the editors and authors of this book, as members of this network – seek to contribute to the important project of decentring and decolonising the social sciences and humanities and diversifying their starting points in intersectional terms. We approach conceptual collaboration as a foundational dialogical principle motivated by three main objectives: a) to reconsider/rethink theory (in terms of alternative conceptual frameworks and baselines); b) to develop and cultivate visions of globally more fair and adequate research practices in the light of Southern perspectives; and c) to explore the potentials of genuine conceptual collaboration across disciplines, locations and positionalities. This should be implemented through a decentred, collaborative exchange with scholars based on diverging positions, moving beyond rhetorical discourses and problematizations towards a different praxis in terms of epistemologies, theorising, methodologies and research ethics that underpin academic knowledge productions and inform and interact

² Alatas 2002; Castillo, Rubis and Pattathu 2023; Chilisa 2019; Cusicanqui 2020; Grosfoguel 2012; Maldonado-Torres 2016; Mohanty 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017; Smith 2021; The River and Fire Collective 2021; Quijano 2007; Wynter 2003.

with wider publics (see chapters by Sanya Osha and Ahsan Kamal this volume). Many concepts and intellectual traditions across the world still constitute largely untapped fundamental resources with which to think, and we anticipate dialogically developing innovative approaches and perspectives that can benefit the humanities and social sciences across the global North and South. In other words, we take ‘conceptual collaboration’ seriously as a capacious and dialogically developed theory- and method-oriented reflection process, and we explore where and how far such a format can carry conversations and build ideas. In this effort, we build on long-standing relationships of mutual trust that our authors and network members have built with colleagues and institutions in their respective regions of study. And, importantly, we also make important steps towards dismantling the dominance of Eurocentrism in scholarly theory and academic research practice (see Fatima Castillo, Salim Hmimnat, Fathima Nizaruddin, June Rubis, Abida Bano and Khan/Holz/Fleschenberg, this volume).

The inferences we have drawn from the formats of dialogue and knowledge exchange in the framework of *co²libri* have convinced us of the need to also go beyond ‘discussing concepts’ and relating their understandings across cultures and world regions. Going beyond means to start out from a preconceptual epistemic vantage point, in which there is no given particular concept that informs the way we perceive reality. Rather, the lived reality itself encourages the formulation of concepts. Taking lived reality as a starting point allows us to see and embrace the plurality of ontological models that support the understanding of concepts. This applies also to more complicated scenarios, namely when several understandings of a concept are in contest with each other in the same societal environment (as Abdoulaye Sounaye and colleagues are exploring for the Hausa term *boko*, i.e. secular or Western education, in West Africa),³ or where concepts are applied methodologically in a ‘reversing gaze’ perspective, with double standards once the target group changes (see the conversation between Nahed Samour and Elísio Macamo, this volume). Furthermore, as one dwells on the challenges of living together in the 21st century, concepts embedded in the living practices of subjects across the globe speak to the conundrums of the global health crisis, forced migration and climate change.⁴ South African and East African notions of *ubuntu* and *utu*, for instance, point to the interrelatedness of all human subjects to the extent that they acknowledge a relational social identity. These notions, often

³ See Sounaye and colleagues in the ZMO-based research group ‘Religion, Morality and boko’ (ReMoboko): <https://www.zmo.de/en/research/mainresearchprogram/contested-religion/remoboko>, accessed August 4, 2023.

⁴ See Abimbola 2019 and Richardson 2019.

generalized as a relational ‘I am because we are’ approach, speak for the recognition of the interdependence that characterizes human–non-human relations as well as the relationship between humanity and the environment. Rethinking ‘the human’ from here offers new and different foundational perspectives, feeding into a valuable, different kind of social theory.

In theoretical terms, an important aim of co²libri is to cultivate conceptual collaboration through the involvement of different and complementary perspectives. This is a productive means both to uncover the ontological models that nurture the epistemic framing and perception and sensitize researchers and to increase awareness (among specialists and the wider public) of concepts and theoretical notions relevant to people’s life worlds in the North and South (see Ahsan Kamal, Fatima Castillo and June Rubis, for example, this volume).

These imperatives and challenges animate *Thinking with the South*. Consisting of contributions from the co²libri network members mostly from the South but also with collaborators from the North, *Thinking with the South* is an invitation and a challenge to think with, learn from and value epistemologies, praxes and forms of collaboration emerging from the South (African, Middle Eastern and South and Southeast Asian contexts) and between Southern and Northern knowledge makers who have long been theorising, researching and tackling issues related to inequalities in knowledge production, decolonisation, ethics, academic freedom and scholar-activism. The authors not only discuss and engage in dialogue with partners, but also put the principle of ‘no research about you without you’ into practice (i.e. people should not be studied without their consent and involvement; see e.g. Fatima Castillo, Susanne Schmeidl, this volume), aiming to overcome a tradition of objectification of non-Western peoples. In various complementary ways, they have been laying out and elaborating upon key challenges that they have been facing, negotiating and tackling and the constructive counter-strategies which they have been actively shaping and coining pragmatically in response, as well as developing and asserting conceptual and theoretical approaches to collaboration, knowledge production, decoloniality, justice and activism, among others. Readers of this volume gain insights, for instance, into some constructive mechanisms and conceptual and methodological approaches that the contributors here developed when facing situations of structural inequality – be it in terms of funding for collaborative research or in terms of threats to academic freedom, neglect, or a dismissive attitude towards their scholarship because of their skin colour, gender or origin. These are reflexive, methodological, theoretical and critical positions that are creatively produced in quite different ways and are often grounded in and related to specific regional intellectual traditions and historical contexts that nonetheless have global significance.

As such, *Thinking with the South* addresses concerns about epistemological and political asymmetries: what would a more decentred (i.e. non-hegemonic), context-sensitive, critical de- or postcolonial knowledge production praxis look like for scholars from marginalised places and positions within the various global Souths as well as across the global North–South divide? In what ways do theoretical approaches, methodologies and ethical standards need to be revised when key concepts and approaches from Southern sites of enunciation are the main reference points? How do we then, for instance, think human life worlds and societies, as well as the relations between human, non-human and more-than-human beings, differently, and how does this enrich scholarly conversations and knowledges anywhere in the world?

By putting emphasis on the necessity of engaging dialogically with knowledge archives, intellectual traditions and theories outside the global North and across the global South, we want to foreground politically marginalised epistemological repertoires. But more than that, we also seek to move beyond the very dichotomies of North–South and centre–periphery by jointly and dialogically exploring the generative possibilities of what we call ‘conceptual collaboration,’ and thus a different research and teaching praxis. That is, we remain cautious and critical when we speak of ‘North’ and ‘South.’ We understand these terms less as reflecting real-world geographic locations than as analytics that index entangled and unequal relations of power in intersectional terms. While they are useful to address lingering global inequalities, their generalising tendencies may also obstruct a close view of the complex realities, historical specificities and often transnational entanglements involved in knowledge production. Such particularities need to be emphasized and better understood to be able to address lingering inequalities adequately (see Part One of this volume with contributions by Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Grace Akello and Prince Guma as well as Ahsan Kamal).

Urgencies

These days, urgent demands for decolonising academia abound, albeit with varying genealogies and trajectories in different parts of the world. Having become resonant only relatively recently in the global North, decolonial theory has been flourishing for decades in parts of the global South that have been struggling against the ongoing effects of colonisation, both physical and metaphorical, as well as among racialised and minoritised knowledge producers in the global North. These are decolonial theorists and activists who do not necessarily use the term ‘decolonial’ but who confront in various ways the coloniality

of knowledge, being and power that dehumanises non-Western epistemologies, bodies and praxes. Moosavi warns that the seeming “decolonial bandwagon” in the North is in danger of ignoring these theories “despite them being well established and sophisticated” and thus reproducing the coloniality of knowledge in the current turn to decoloniality in the global North.⁵ At the same time, there are numerous South–South exchanges and collaborations that bypass the global North and do not take the global North as a point of reference.⁶ *Thinking with the South* recognises these genealogies, engages with them, and works by centring the many important rehumanising and redistributive praxes already being done by global South knowledge makers, even if not all of them use the term decolonial.

It is important to acknowledge these genealogies and address such erasures. It is also crucial to be cognisant of the criticisms related to the turn to decoloniality. Indigenous scholars, for instance, have criticised the appropriation and extraction of Indigenous knowledges and methodologies by non-Indigenous scholars both in the global North and in the global South in their engagement with decoloniality, especially those who are white or have a proximity to whiteness, and of excluding or tokenising Indigenous knowledge makers in the process.⁷ These ultimately reproduce the knowledge hierarchies that decoloniality is purportedly dismantling. Aymara activist and sociologist Sylvia Rivera Cusicanqui in particular calls out specific scholars, especially those located in North America, for building ‘an empire within an empire’ on the back of what she refers to as strategic appropriation by these scholars of the works of subaltern thinkers, including Indigenous scholars, in India and Latin America.⁸ She furthermore argues:

Neologisms such as de-colonial, transmodernity, and eco-si-mía proliferate, and such language entangles and paralyzes their objects of study: the indigenous and African-descended people with whom these academics believe they are in dialogue. But they also create a new academic canon, using a world of references and counterreferences that establish hierarchies and adopt new gurus.⁹

⁵ Moosavi 2020, 2.

⁶ See for example the Global Tapestry of Alternatives: <https://www.globaltapestryofalternatives.org>, accessed July 27, 2023.

⁷ Cusicanqui 2020; The River and Fire Collective 2021; Tuck and Yang 2012.

⁸ Cusicanqui 2020, 98.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

Critics have taken to task, too, decolonial scholars who do not reflect on their own complicities in settler colonialism and land dispossession.¹⁰ Decoloniality thus runs the risk of being insignificant, unable if not unwilling to address and redress structural inequalities, racism, discrimination and silencing, thus preserving Eurocentric and white power and privilege.¹¹ As contemporary researchers in/from the global South and North, we, the editors and authors of this volume, acknowledge that it remains a duty and obligation for all academics working in affected and related fields today to address and redress the ongoing effects of coloniality as well as to be critically reflexive about our decolonial work. Among them are the perpetuation of inequality and academic (and epistemic) injustice, which we are undeniably participating in, within a system with a Eurocentric history. Those of us who are from the global North, specifically white scholars, have benefitted from such hierarchies more so than others; those who are based in the global North still continue to benefit from such inherent inequalities and dependencies in the global research landscape.¹² These are issues that the co²libri initiative and the authors of this volume in particular seek to address and redress, in sensitive and appropriate ways.

There are differential positionalities even among those occupying academic spaces in the North, which is reflected also with a view to the three editors of this book. As such, the process of preparing and editing this book has itself stimulated more thorough reflections on the complex webs and dynamics of privilege, power, dependencies and inequalities that the contributors as well as us editors are entangled in. What ‘decolonial’ means for each of us and our praxis, and what stakes and concerns are involved, is the outcome of such reflections. Notably, the power, privileges and challenges that a woman scholar-activist of color in white academia, such as Rosa Castillo who is a Filipina working in and on the Philippines and its diaspora, differ from those of Andrea Fleschenberg, who is a white East German woman working in and on South and Southeast Asia, and that of Kai Kresse, a male white West German working in and on Africa. We are all Berlin-based but with varying academic positions and security (Castillo is untenured, Fleschenberg and Kresse are permanent faculty, Kresse a full professor) that shape differing access to resources and power. We also do not face the same forms of exclusion (such as racism, epistemic violence, and sexism), and

¹⁰ Castillo, Rubis and Pattathu 2023; Tuck and Yang 2012.

¹¹ Moosavi 2020, 2023; The River and Fire Collective 2021.

¹² See for example Hountondji 1990.

the risks of speaking out against coloniality in academia in themselves vary as scholars move across the global North and South.¹³

This book, however, is also evidence of a shared goal that all its contributors, from different vantage points, contribute to in different ways, drawing from their respective expertise and positionalities. While everyone has a stake in decolonizing knowledge production, the stakes for white scholars differ from those who identify as Black, Indigenous and Person of Color, for whom decolonial work has been an existential part and parcel of fighting against the dehumanization that they and their communities are subjected to at everyday, epistemic, and structural levels. Such reflections and divergent positionalities are presented in the contributions of this volume, providing reflexive accounts of positionalities, experiences, activism, and theorizing. As a way to work through these varying positionalities, the editorial process of this volume proceeded through a peer mentoring process where authors commented on and reviewed each other's chapters. Not only is this process collaborative, it also offers an alternative to problematics of a simple blind review process which has been criticized for *de facto* being harmful and rife with sexism, racism, and Eurocentrism.¹⁴

Few things are more important these days than dedicating a substantial part of one's intellectual energy, as well as time and financial resources as scholars, to an engagement in activities and processes that will contribute to alleviating states of inequality and injustice. Redressing the ways in which scholars based in the North (or supported by it) benefit from larger research structures and a system that has been based on unfair foundations has become a burning issue. This does not mean, however, that all inequalities are reducible to the after-effects of colonisation. Such a simplifying view would risk ignoring relevant specific regional and local dynamics and the respective histories and agencies of the people concerned, a critique which has led some to reject loose and generalising usages of 'decolonisation' as misleading.¹⁵ Keeping this in view is all the more important given the ongoing pervasiveness of coloniality within post-colonies perpetrated also by national political elites. Scholarly debates on related matters are inevitably political and often highly politicised, and then in danger of presenting complex issues of decolonial aspirations in simple dichotomies, as part of a (sometimes heavily) normative rhetoric about who is (and who is not) permitted to speak, explore or participate in debate about these issues. In the light of these points, our volume seeks to combine both the necessary and important perspec-

¹³ Castillo 2023.

¹⁴ Docot 2022.

¹⁵ See for example Taiwo 2022.

tives, of the view on specificity and the provision of critique, when it comes to decolonial challenges and demands. The contributions here offer a wide range of specific accounts, discussions and case studies that engage with issues of decolonisation from diverse angles, each linked to a specific regional context. At the same time, readers are introduced to discussions about the benefits and challenges of thinking and theorising with concepts, models and thinkers from the global South.

Academic freedom is another urgent issue with which the contributors to *Thinking with the South* engage, particularly in view of recent political developments around the world, such as funding cuts for critical scholarship, a rise in (neo) populism and authoritarianism, and growing mistrust in science and governments across the globe (see Fathima Nizaruddin, Salim Hmimnat and Abida Bano, this volume). There is an urgent need to create and maintain inclusive spaces and collaborative formats that enable open dialogue and mutual exchange between academics, critical thinkers and activists based in the global North and South (see Hala Kamal, this volume). Given that this cannot be neatly mapped onto or assigned to particular localities (i.e. a global North versus a global South), we take academic freedom itself as a lens to interrogate North–South epistemic and political relations. In the context of practical experiences of collaboration, we enquire into the manifold genealogies and dynamics through which spaces and the practice of academic freedom become shaped and circumscribed (with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic’s long *durée* and its impacts on knowledge production practices, see Khan/Holz/Fleschenberg, this volume). And we engage in critical activities together with partners who are directly affected by the contraction of academic freedom.

Contributions to This Edited Volume

This volume brings together a series of chapters that vary in format and length, written by scholars who take on a range of disciplinary, (trans)regional and epistemic perspectives. On the whole, the authors here, almost exclusively from the global South and working from different positionalities, are united in the goal to produce more adequate and more sensitive critical knowledge, and to provide and apply innovative perspectives on matters of approach, method and ethical standards. Alternative frames of reference for conceptualisation to established Eurocentric narratives of disciplines are given, as well as theorisations of lived experiences in specific non-Western worlds (which may be grounded in their respective intellectual traditions). Along such lines, the chapters build on and com-

plement a wider scenario of multi-layered, multi-disciplinary and transregional discussions and critical takes on the existing state of research and its underlying practices. Overall, the volume aims to build and shape transformative understandings and practices concerning what it means to take an adequate position, and a constructive role, for scholars based in the global North and/or South within the current field of calls and demands for decolonisation. So what we offer, with this collection of a range of diverse, brief, experience-near accounts of problems, challenges, projects and experiences by authors who are writing from, and thinking with, the South, is also a resource book (representing considerable internal diversity) to be engaged with, for further thinking and acting along meaningful lines.

Part One consists of reflections on the epistemological challenges of a wider system of hegemonic knowledge productions, the neoliberal and (neo-)colonial academia in a globalized world, characterized, shaped and constantly re-enacted by power asymmetries, intersecting exclusions and marginalisation.

The first forum entry in this collection speaks to this problematique through three voices, edited by Prince K. Guma with some introductory reflections. In **Global Coloniality of Power and Collaborative Knowledge Production**, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni highlights three key issues of a structural, ideational, epistemic and ontological nature which should be considered in any engagements on possibilities of genuine collaboration and partnership in knowledge production between scholars across the global South–North divide. He argues, first, that the South–North divide is more than a geography: it is also an epistemic and social location mediated by colonial matrices of power. Drawing from the work of the social anthropologist Francis B. Nyamnjoh,¹⁶ Ndlovu-Gatsheni identifies ‘ontologies of incompleteness’ as a social reality, which is amenable to the envisaged ‘convivial scholarship’ that we should be working for. The thesis of ‘ontologies of incompleteness’ directly challenges what Slavoj Žižek termed the ‘spectre of the Cartesian Subject’ which was haunting Europe.¹⁷ Eurocentric Cartesian conceptions of subjectivity, he says, are not amenable to any form of collaboration and partnership because they are opposed to the very possibilities of discursive intersubjectivity. The second issue is the resilient cognitive empire which continues to undercut possibilities of genuine collaboration and partnership through the sustenance of hierarchies and heterarchies of power, argues Ndlovu-Gatsheni. The third issue is the equally resilient unequal intellectual division of labour in the current global economy of knowledge. He concludes his reflections by making

¹⁶ Nyamnjoh 2017.

¹⁷ Žižek 1999.

a case for decolonisation predicated on relationality as an essential prerequisite for any genuine and sustainable collaboration and partnership between global North and global South scholars and institutions. The key message is a call for structural changes and changes to the intellectual consciousness of scholars in order for sustainable collaboration and partnership to emerge. Adding to Ndlovu-Gatsheni's call for structural changes and changes of intellectual consciousness of scholars as fundamentals of academic decolonisation are Prince K. Guma's reflections on **The Incompleteness of Scientific Knowledge**. Focusing as well on the 'infrastructures of collaboration,' Guma points towards an incompleteness of knowledge itself to challenge teleological pursuits in the academy and to propose possible pathways for consideration including calibration of collaborative infrastructures of knowledge production. He stresses a problematic tendency in academia to depict occurrences in developing contexts as adverse, divergent and outside the norm. Many scholars and practitioners tend to misrepresent such occurrences as deficient, failed and inadequate, he argues. While some put their faith in a type of blue print solutions, best practices and idyllic models as a panacea for *success*, others seek mechanisms of repair, renovation, and demolition or realignment as *solutions*. Inspired by the endeavour to find solutions and success, most scholars barely look beyond neoliberal-level precarity and compliance in their explorations. Within the social sciences, *solutions* have come to lie in proposals for furthering and enhancing investment, financing, planning, governance and regulatory reform and sometimes substituting state with non-state actors, or top-down with bottom-up approaches. These tendencies, Prince Guma argues, signify a general incompleteness of intellectual loops and circuits, so that it becomes important to acknowledge the very incompleteness of theory production and knowledge making itself and to counter teleological pursuits in academia. Reflecting upon asymmetries of academic collaborations, the third entry in this forum is presented by Grace Akello, who scrutinizes **The Nature of Inequality in Scientific Collaborations in Africa** with a particular focus on asymmetries in grant applications in global South–North research cooperation. Akello notes that when emerging scholars read calls for research grant applications by reputable grant-awarding bodies aiming to support their scientific research, everything on paper appears neutral, apolitical and value-free. Calls for applications encourage scientists to create a North–South union in order to comprehensively assess matters of global concern. In jointly producing *scientific* evidence – needed for interventions for protracted challenges – it appears that scientific evidence is indeed needed and is a panacea solution for protracted challenges. In many scientific meetings, evidence-based interventions are reported and evidence-based solutions are a basis for mitigating protracted global challenges, particularly in Africa. Few scientists have explored the detailed nature

of scientific collaborations and how inequality is created and perpetuated, she argues. In more than ten years of participation in major scientific collaborations, Grace Akello has observed that the entire process, from the inception of research priorities/questions, to methods, to how the grant will be managed, is an embodiment of various forms of inequality. Guidelines concerning what is science, how to apply and who will lead, manage or systematically report about the grant are a reflection of a systemic perpetuation of inequality, she argues in line with her co-authors. Although scientists from the South aim to make a significant contribution to the field including data collection and analysis, distribution of funds will suggest an economic and social imbalance. This is evidenced, for example, by fund allocation premises such as the annual income of the collaborator in the South or the GDP of the Southern collaborator as a frequently evoked basis for inequitable budget allocations for the same task performed. However, this fund allocation premise is regardless of workload, seniority or expertise in the case of a Southern researcher, earning much less compared to the researcher in the North. This systemic inequality is further perpetuated when only particular aspects of the research budget can be managed in the South.

The second forum entry, **'Reversing the Gaze'?! – Revisiting a Key Concept**, is a document of one of our many interdisciplinary and transregional conversations with colleagues ranging from the Middle East to Africa, Asia and Europe – in this case between Elísio Macamo, Professor of Sociology at the University of Basel and one of four principal investigators of the research project 'Reversing the Gaze – Towards Post-Comparative Area Studies,' and Nahed Samour, postdoctoral research fellow at the Integrative Research Institute Law & Society at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, concerned with Third World approaches to international law. Both scholars contend issues and implications of conceptual 'gazing,' not only for transregional and interdisciplinary knowledge productions. They raise concerns of epistemological and disciplinary boundaries and flaws and argue, if this is the appropriate term, a decentering or 'provincializing' of epistemological and disciplinary radars along with subsequent alternate research praxes.

This first part of the edited volume is complemented by two entries of single-authored discussion papers reflecting on Southern theorising and the challenges and practices thereof. Ahsan Kamal, in his chapter **What Good Is Southern Theorising?**, discusses contentious fields, blind spots and limitations as well as entry points or potentials for decolonising theoretical knowledge productions as part of the contemporary discourse of academic decolonisation.¹⁸ Kamal acknowledges scholars' and activists' long-standing calls for decolonising knowl-

¹⁸ See Moosavi 2020.

edge, the academy and theory itself, thus globalising, diversifying and expanding the social theoretical canon to shed its Eurocentric and imperial baggage. However, he notes, in accordance with a number of critics, that most projects of new theorising are located in the global North, or they tend to follow Western academic trends, creating a rupture between epistemic and political decolonisation. What, then, he asks, is the potential for decolonising knowledge from the global South in the current era? Distinguishing between Northern attempts to ‘southernise theory’ from ‘southern theorising,’ Ahsan Kamal presents a conceptual framework based on the historical and social conditions of anti-colonial thought. Using the North as a relational concept determined by location, vocation and publics, he identifies the borders that need to be crossed to theorise from the South. His reflections rely on attempts to theorise from the study of rural activism in Pakistan to save water, land and ecological commons by demonstrating that the possibility of Southern theorising is often foreclosed due to hard boundaries between disciplines, theory and praxis, academia and activism, and the North and the South.

Marxism, Communitarianism and Communalism in Africa by Sanya Osha traces the development of Marxist thought with a particular focus on West Africa and explores theoretical alterations in praxis through the travels of Marxist thought that are evident in the eastern and western regions of the continent. Sanya Osha argues that in East Africa, there is an evident deployment of the concept of *ujamaa*, which may be regarded as an endogenous form of communitarianism and its eventual utilization in the larger nation-building project particularly in Tanzania. Communalism, communitarianism and communism (alternatively, the triple Cs) are all addressed in varying degrees to underline the significance of the collective ethos in the organization of everyday life, economic modalities and institutions, formal and heretical forms of political practice, and ultimately in defining the political economy of need. Understandably, the analyses of these socio-economic and political practices and processes seek to capture and unpack African realities and peculiarities against a hectic backdrop of neo-colonialism and uneven decolonisation, Osha stresses. In interrogating the triple Cs in the work of African thinkers, *inter alia*, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Samir Amin and Ifeanyi Menkiti are discussed, including tensions and correlations between communalism and classical Marxian praxis, various conceptions of property and ownership and, finally, the shifting perceptions of land and its multiple histories and uses.

Part Two consists of eight discussion papers that scrutinise critical research methodologies, research methods and research ethics as decolonial, positionality-conscious and self-reflexive praxis with transregional insights ranging from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to South and Southeast Asia, Europe

and Australia. In **The Conflicted Decolonial Scholar: A Journey Through the Dialectics of Becoming, Un-becoming and Being, in Struggle with the People**, Fatima Alvarez Castillo takes us on a journey through the complexities of decolonial work for global South scholars, that is, bearers of colonial mentality who at the same time are struggling to break free and create liberatory scholarship, as evident in her own academic coming of age. Drawing from her teaching, research and ethics work as well as from revisiting the canon of critical approaches to knowledge productions, Fatima Alvarez Castillo shares difficulties, learnings and breakthroughs in and with the struggle against the dominant academic paradigm that sustains the colonial matrix of power. Reflexivity, alliance building with the oppressed both within and outside the university, and working with high standards of rigour, ethics and truthfulness while being mindful of the need for insurgent scholarship that contributes to making a more just and kinder world, are among the practices to counter the highlighted challenges, she argues. For Castillo, “[d]ecolonial scholarship has many sources of knowledge, methods, techniques, tools, wisdom, both subaltern and mainstream. We don’t have to invent, mostly. Rich materials have been developed in feminist pedagogy, critical studies, indigenous studies, and by decolonial scholars. What is needed, perhaps, is more imagination; more praxis.”¹⁹ Why a praxis-centred approach is key is outlined in her 2016 intervention at an international conference in Durban, South Africa, with which she ends her chapter to our edited volume, and which merits posting in this introduction:

When we peel away its wrappings, the notion of practicality is intended to stop any fundamental changes to the global system of coloniality and its exploitative economic structural arrangements. We must insist on our ideals and draw inspiration from the suffering of people. More than ever, consciousness is a crucial arena of struggle for liberation. This is our arena. We need to first decolonise our own consciousness to produce liberatory knowledge to support workers, peasants, students, the urban poor, and indigenous peoples to construct a more humane world. Some of us in academia have reproduced myths for domination, while others are trying to produce knowledge in struggle with the people.²⁰

The second contribution, **Feminist Research and Civil Society Engagement as Scholactivism: The Case of the Women and Memory Forum in Egypt** by Hala Kamal, provides us with an insightful discussion of ‘scholactivism,’ that is, feminist knowledge productions in Arabic and entangled practices of translation, academic publishing and archival repositories by the Egypt-based Women and

¹⁹ Alvarez Castillo, this volume.

²⁰ Alvarez Castillo 2017, 446–47.

Memory Forum (WMF). Hala Kamal situates her writing on feminist activism in its civil society location and rights discourses, where translation from and into the Arabic language significantly impacts the circulation and transformation of feminism as theory, and gender as both critical concept and analytical tool. Situated at the intersection of feminist scholarship, activism and knowledge production, informed by Edward Said's concern with the processes and effects of 'travelling theory,' and with reference to Hoda Elsadda's observations on the consequences of the translocation of international human rights discourses in Arab contexts, Hala Kamal focuses on the journey of feminism and gender in the Arab world, as well as across academia and civil society. The main argument here is that translation plays a significant role of mediation in the transportation and transformation of feminist and gender discourses, and hence in the production of feminist knowledge for social change. She argues that through (feminist) translation, feminist theory is not simply relocated in Arabic language and discourses but undergoes a journey that both transforms this Western theory during its passage and produces feminist theory and knowledge in Arabic. Civil society, as represented here by WMF, is shown by Hala Kamal as a site of knowledge production and a space which, as much as it introduces feminist thought to academic work, also injects feminist activism with scholarship, travelling across scholarship and activism, as well as beyond academia and civil society. The translated texts, in turn, occupy a new position as a site of intersecting scholarship and activism, and a manifestation of the way academics can play a direct role in promoting social justice – specifically gender justice – through translation, she explains.

Taking us to the field of critical social sciences in Morocco, the second case study from the MENA region, written by Salim Hmimnat, highlights research methodological and ethical issues arising from undertaking empirical field research in challenging contexts where critical social sciences are considered of less value and significance compared with other fields of knowledge. In **Pragmatic Research, Critical Knowledge and Political Relevance: A Self-Reflexive Perspective**, Salim Hmimnat draws on a reflexive exploration of his research experience concerning power, religion and security in Morocco, framed by an intertwined matrix of state discursive hegemony and geopolitical interests (i.e. '*la raison d'état*,' 'the global war on terror'). He identifies some coping strategies in relation to questions of accessibility, positionality and networking with the aim to produce a research-based knowledge at once of added critical value and socio-political relevance for the decision-maker. In a challenging academic environment, the 'pragmatic' researcher in the global South, Hmimnat argues, is arguably exhorted to formulate a grounded, context-sensitive research agenda that forges a fine equilibrium between in-depth critical knowledge and political relevance. Regardless of its potential pitfalls and implications, such a delicate

equilibrium would endow critical social knowledge with a performative legitimacy that would make it possible to recognise its vital worth and ensure its further growth and sustainability over the long term, Hmimnat highlights.

Shifting from one regional space, MENA, to a country sometimes positioned as in Central or South Asia, Afghanistan, Susanne Schmeidl, in **Whose Stories, Whose Voices, Whose Narratives? Challenging the Western Gaze on Afghanistan – Exploring Ethical Knowledge Co-Production in Afghanistan**, provides us with a third self-reflexive, exploratory account by a global North scholar, now based in Australia (a settler colonial context), who has worked closely with Afghan ‘knowledge brokers’ in community-based collaborative action research contexts in Afghanistan for extended periods of time. Based on her experience of collaborative research with two grassroots organizations in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014, as well as subsequent engagement with young Afghan researchers, Susanne Schmeidl explores questions around knowledge production in Afghanistan and the role of external (white) researchers and their interactions with the stories told by (or data of) others, local researchers and knowledge brokers. One key spotlight is the often implicit expectation of ‘locals’ to produce stories, and for the white researcher to make sense of stories, rather than to appreciate the process as collective sense-making and knowledge co-production. Adding to this, Susanne Schmeidl questions not only the emphasis of Western epistemology on the written word over oration, but also the domination of a foreign language such as English in an intensive state-building context such as Afghanistan, which functions as a form of colonising knowledge production (borrowing here from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o).²¹ Taking her cue from her experience and work within anti-colonial lenses, she explores (1) how Indigenous methodologies might facilitate the process of knowledge co-production; (2) how knowledge co-production could be achieved when working with oral cultures; and (3) how this was practised in the context of a local research organisation and associated learning to navigate power imbalances between local and international researchers to improve co-production over extractive research. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith highlights in her seminal book on decolonising methodologies (in its third edition by 2021):

The intellectual project of decolonizing has to set out ways to proceed through a colonizing world. It needs a radical compassion that reaches out, that seeks collaboration, and that is open to possibilities that can only be imagined as other things fall into place. Decolonizing Methodologies is not a method for revolution in a political sense but provokes some

²¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986.

revolutionary thinking about the roles that knowledge, knowledge production, knowledge hierarchies and knowledge institutions play in decolonization and social transformation.²²

Adding to the discussion on alternative, decolonising and decentring practices are Fathima Nizaruddin's reflections and explorations in **Academic Tamasha and Its Limits under the Shadow of Authoritarianism**, conceptualised from the position of and sharing personal experiences as a critical scholar from India, entangled with global North collaborations and encounters. Even as academia produces discourses on liberatory possibilities, its structures of power remain largely centred in the hands of heterosexual white men from privileged backgrounds in the global North, Fathima Nizaruddin asserts. The proverbial dead white men exist in the hallowed corners of academia at perfect ease with their living counterparts, who can produce erudite accounts of postcolonial or feminist theory within structures where the entry of any kind of outsiders will be as difficult as that of the camel through the eye of a needle, she stresses. Within the heavily policed infrastructures of academia, even the outsiders generally have privileges such as class or caste to turn their work into saleable academic concepts with the magic wand of citation metrics. In such a scenario, she explores the possibility of using the South Asian notion of *tamasha* as a framework to navigate the tricky terrain of academia. *Tamasha* here refers to an attitude that draws from the word's connotation as a joke or perverse entertainment;²³ approaching academia through such a framework would be an act of participation with an amount of self-derision which questions the very legitimacy of its codes and structures. Fathima Nizaruddin further explores the limitations of 'doing *tamasha*' when faced with authoritarian repression as in the case of contemporary India, and the hegemonic discourses and practices for critical researchers to navigate, part of a wider matrix of asymmetries, marginalisations, silences and exclusions within the existing geopolitics of knowledge productions.

Continuing our journey with fellow travellers concerned with concrete decolonial practices of research methods and research ethics, Abida Bano takes us to the 'peripheries' of postcolonial Pakistan in her discussion paper, titled **Hegemony and Decolonising Research Praxis: A Researcher's Journey in the Peripheries of Pakistan**. As a scholar of peace and conflict as well as gender studies based in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, she reflects on her experiences and observations in navigating and negotiating hegemonic practices and discourses when engaged in fieldwork-based decolonial knowledge

²² Smith 2021, xii.

²³ Nizaruddin 2017.

productions. For Abida Bano, decolonising research methodologies discourses pose vital epistemological questions such as ‘who, how, and when’ to knowledge production, questions which are critical to understanding the underlying power dynamics and politics of research. However, research methodologies standardised in the global North do not adequately speak to the complexities of research in the peripheries of Pakistan, while prevalent research practices are counter-intuitive to Indigenous knowledge production. Hegemonic research practices, ranging from university research bodies to fieldwork, are a barrier to the free flow of young researchers’ ability to conceive original research ideas and pursue them, she argues. Grey zones of social research methodologies, informed by colonial legacies, are further muddled by ‘elitism’ within the community of researchers in Pakistan.²⁴ Ironically, most established researchers seem to be oblivious to their role in recreating the colonial research culture of ‘othering.’ Subsequently, Abida Bano explores the hegemonic research practices that prevail in Pakistani academia and their impact on researchers and their contributions to Indigenous knowledge production through a number of vignettes. These vignettes document reflexive accounts by herself and fellow researchers of several encounters with ‘researchers in the field’ to demonstrate how researchers navigate overarching hegemonic discourses and practices and how this affects their career prospects as well as their contributions to the wider ‘field(s)’ of academic knowledge production.

In **A Political Ecology of Remembering for Dayaks of Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo**, June Rubis highlights that remembering can be a powerful political decolonial act. Remembering can also be an act of survivance and refusal. Through the framework of political ecology of remembering, she reflects on the different types of remembering, including ‘*contra-remembering*’ in relation to native customary domains that are also orang utan conservation landscapes in Sarawak, Malaysia Borneo. June Rubis suggests *contra-rememberings* are one of the ways that speak towards continuance and thriving of Indigenous presence(s) over and against conservation forces and actions on native lands. Furthermore, she proposes how *contra-remembering* with Indigenous interlocutors/theorists may lead to decolonising political ecology.

The final chapter of Part Two is by Muhammad Salman Khan, Sarah Holz and Andrea Fleschenberg, tandem partners of the hybrid Working Group *Researching Asia in Pandemic Times*, set up at HU/IAAW from 2020 to late 2022 in response to the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on academic practices, spaces, encounters and concerns of decolonial, feminist ethics of care. As an exploratory

²⁴ See also Fleschenberg 2023.

chapter, **Researching South Asia in Pandemic Times – Of Shifting Fields, Research Tools, Risks, Emotions and Research Relationships** documents an interdisciplinary, transregional, research-based learning initiative, bringing together early career researchers operating from divergent positionalities towards their intellectual engagements with South Asia during the pandemic. The authors discuss some key challenges, themes and shared experiences as well as practices developed to negotiate interdisciplinary, decentred, critical approaches of context-sensitive knowledge productions amid the pandemic, cognisant of local geographies, in epistemic, methodological and research ethical terms. What are pandemic-specific manifestations and ramifications for knowledge productions and research relationships, and how can they be navigated and negotiated? How can one identify and read pandemic implications in terms of divergent notions and intersectional differences of ‘risk,’ ‘crisis,’ ‘exposure’ and ‘vulnerabilities’? Furthermore, what are the long-term legacies and opportunities of the pandemic, such as a potential digital turn in terms of negotiating the ‘field,’ for (re)reading the available canon and rethinking research methods and ethics? Salman Khan, Sarah Holz and Andrea Fleschenberg also include thoughts on opportunities and cleavages in terms of digital mentoring initiatives, academic writing and field-work-oriented research relationships within and beyond the global North–South divide.²⁵

These are just some of the most striking examples and illustrations of how the contributions assembled here provide a wide range of diverse takes and approaches to addressing inequality in academia, as a researcher in (or coming from) neglected and marginalised regions for which it has become common to use the generalising and often confusing term ‘global South.’ This is indeed a bottom line that applies to this volume on the whole: it is a joint endeavour about the dedicated exercise of questioning, exploring and interrogating further the possibilities of finding and coining fruitful approaches, takes and thoughts on how to substantially and seriously engage with Southern theory and intellectual traditions – within all limitations – and more so, how to develop patterns and practices of dealing with constraints and (nevertheless) facilitating insights. In these chapters, we are being made aware of a whole range of relevant and pressing specific aspects and matters that need to be engaged with, by researchers with their respective specific interests, qualifications and positionalities, for the sake of shaping and cultivating research that is sensitive and appropriate. In this way, these contributions map specific, concrete and (promising) workable pathways of research that may call itself ‘decolonial’ in constructive terms, with specific and

²⁵ See Fleschenberg and Castillo 2022.

substantial yet clearly delineated contributions to make. It is in their overlapping and intersecting partial, distinct and delineated togetherness, in which readers are getting to view them here, that a vision for more possibilities of such kinds of specific and constructive work of decolonising arises.

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Part One: **Openings**

Ahsan Kamal

What Good Is Southern Theorising?

|

The river flows from اتر (uttar) to دکھن (dakkan)- north to south out to the ocean. In the stories and poems of the land of rivers, lovers plead the beloved not to head South on a boat, for they fear a long separation as the beloved travels south with the river and west to the Indian ocean world. The beloved can only return when the monsoon makes its customary return each year, as they say in Marathi नेमेची येतो मग पावसाळा. In our language of love, it is customary for lovers to ask their beloved to return home with the winds: اب کے ساون گھر آجا (come home this monsoon).

In Urdu, the poor is غریب (gharib) and the west مغرب (maghrib). The former in Persian means 'stranger,' the latter in Arabic means 'where the sun sets.' It makes sense that those who arrived from the west, beyond the fertile plains of the سندھو (River Indus) and گنگا (River Ganges) were strange and poor and came for the riches of this land. Those who travelled west were poor and estranged, uprooted, and living in پردیس (pardes), Sanskrit for an-other's homeland.

Now that the West has taken all our wealth, the imperial scholars define poverty in relation to productivity and not in relation to land, fertility, familiarity, and home. The masses of the East (South) are indeed poor: dispossessed, displaced, dwelling in ruins. Dreaming of reaching مغرب (maghrib)...the West. To escape their غربت (ghurbat)...strangeness of being.

For centuries in the land of the rivers,¹ wind, rain, and river flows have provided for a bountiful existence for humans and non-humans alike. The North and the South used to refer to the directions of our rivers and winds, and East and West to trade routes. Songs spoke of seasons when lovers would return from foreign lands with the monsoon winds. Nature provided the basis for orienting selves and tied human endeavours to lands, waters, and other beings.

Now the world has turned upside down and spins the wrong way around, and the North is no longer the name of a cardinal direction. The North names the orientation towards the modern capitalist-colonial world. No longer a simple referent to the direction of the winds and rivers, travellers and lovers, seasons and songs. Our rivers no longer flow southwards to meet their beloved, the sea,

¹ *Sapta Sindhu* – the land of seven rivers; Punjab, the land of five rivers – the land of the Indus (Sindhu) and Ganges (Ganga) river basins spread across Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Tibet, India, and Bangladesh.

but to the new North— to those who have access and entitlements as per the dictates of the modern, (ex)colonial, capitalist, developed world. Enlisted in modern cycles of production and consumption, their bounties are extracted and exported for the Western and Northern peoples.

Capitalist modernity has estranged us from our lands. Strangers, poor, غريب (*gharib*) no longer refers to those who arrive in the bountiful land of the rivers. غريب (*gharib*) now refers to those unable to exit West through immigration, or unable to move into privileged positions in the circuits of production and distribution of modern materials and ideas. What to speak of the lovers and the beloved in tune with the flows of the rivers and the directions of the winds?

Northerners and Theory brought new ideas of modernisation, globalisation, and human ambitions, but their ideas have wrecked the planet. Southerners are kept in check, our bodies and ideas forced into a compartmentalised world – much worse than what Fanon saw.² Borders meant to keep Southerners in check, keep the world oriented towards the North. Easier to cross for Northerners, near impossible for estranged Southerners.

These opening lines draw from southern conversations that are rich with the potential for theorising. Conversations among activists and academics in Pakistan (and elsewhere) provide insights into what is at stake, what is important, what needs to be protected, and what needs to be done. A first step in decolonisation – the endeavour to turn the world right side up – is to locate the North and the borders that uphold the North-oriented world. Borders that constitute the North and the South: geographical, social, and epistemic borders between the core and the periphery, imperial citizens and subjects, the subaltern and the marginal, theory and praxis, academia and activism.

These conversations reflect attempts to roam free across the lands and among people that face existential threats from the Northern onslaught. We are differently engaged in the political task of decolonising the landscapes and mindscapes of the Indus Valley and beyond.³ Conversational reflections constitute the knowledge-systems of the lifeworlds birthed by centuries of fertile mixing of humans and nature at a world-historical scale. They draw from the rich

² Cf. Fanon 2007 [1961]. Fanon saw the compartmentalization of the colonial world as distinct from other structural differentiation as the former had visible material manifestation. But the geographical spread of North-South means that often the walls that compartmentalise are somewhat obscured from view, yet the contrasts are visibly evident.

³ Using the formulation by my colleague, Mushtaq Gaadi, who used the terms landscapes and mindscapes to refer to the subject of the two-volume collection of poems on the Sindhu Darya (River Indus) by Saraiki poet, Ashu Laal, titled *Sindh Saagar Naal Hamesha* (An Eternity with the Indus Ocean).

civilisational history of the region and give us access to the remarkable diversity of human ingenuity, with a multiplicity of languages, spiritual and intellectual traditions, poetry, songs, prose, and performances. Our conversations also bear imprints of Western or Northern knowledge, as many of us are trained in Northern and North-like academic institutions. We draw freely from all these sources, yet strive to reorient ourselves towards the South.

My concern in this paper is simple: how far can we leverage the ideas generated in southern conversations among activists and academics to theorise from the South? In a sense, I am asking to what extent the *Northness* of theory, imperial and decolonial alike, forecloses the possibility of southern theorising. Does proximity to southern struggles matter for political decolonisation – to turn the world right-side up? What is the theorising potential in reflecting on the inevitable destruction of the many souths to constantly create the North? As millions of southerners flee their homes, as billions have hardened desires to escape their ruination and estrangement by migrating to the Global North, I ask: What good is southern theorising anyway?



It is my experience that when the term ‘North’ is used, it invokes mild anxieties among Northern knowledge producers, especially those serious about decolonisation. What is the North? Aren’t you reproducing dichotomies and thinking in binaries? What about the souths in the North and the Norths in the South? Doesn’t the focus on divides and borders ignore mobility, hybridity, and thus reinforce these borders? Most persistently, can’t Northerners also decolonise?⁴

It is therefore useful to first locate the North and provide a way to evaluate the decolonising potential of the North before speaking about southern theorising.⁵ The common uses of the terms North and South are ambiguous, particularly in a strict geographical sense. Historically, the terms North and South were grounded in Cold War logic. On the one hand, imperial institutions used the terms to emphasise North-South economic differences over the East-West cultural

⁴ I have been asked these questions primarily in academic conferences and workshops. In activist spaces, stating that the North is an orientation towards the capitalist-colonial world is usually sufficient.

⁵ In this section, I summarise the key points from a co-authored article that centrally focuses on Northern epistemic decolonisation (Kamal and Courtheyn, forthcoming).

differences.⁶ While North is an orientation towards the capitalist-colonial world in both uses, the South is either a place yet-to-become-North (in modernisation and neoliberal globalisation theories, etc.), or an alternative vision of the good life (in dependency and post-development theories, etc.).

Instead of applying strict geographical and epistemological divides, I suggest using a relational approach. The North is imbued with a *Northness of being* – a relational quality along three axes of location, position, and vocation. As *location*, Northness defines where we are in the upside-down world. Locational Northness does not simply refer to geographical coordinates but to our place in the network of unequal nodes and asymmetrical interconnections that extend Northness to all parts of the globe. But there's undoubtedly a discernible and strong correlation between geography and Northness.

Our location overdetermines our place in the North-oriented world – a world with old and new Europes at its centre and the destruction of a variety of other ways of being as its purpose. These other ways may not be without their own significant violences, but the North-centric world is premised on an unsustainable violence and an unprecedented domination of nature. Being Northern, as imperial citizens and residents, results in higher valuation of labour, higher consumption, and greater life prospects due to an overexposure to accumulated wealth. Being Southern, as imperial subjects and refugees, results in lower valuation of labour and emaciated life prospects due to an overexposure to the death and destruction that sustains Northern prosperity. Being Northern is activity, brands, products, experiences, and theories. Being Southern is work, raw materials, artefacts, and data.

Of course not everyone gets the same share in Northern wealth, and *Northness as position* emphasises differential distribution in a given society. In other words, Northness of location determines the field of possible social positions, and the Northness of position determines one's place in a given field. In this sense, most of the categories of sociological and anthropological analyses deal with issues of position – race, class, gender, and sexuality as well as caste, tribe, religion, ethnicity, etc. A variety of theories and epistemologies are used for the analysis of these categories. Most emphasise identity, marginality, and inclusion, while some focus on the negative space of alterity.⁷

Vocational Northness is directly tied to knowledge production. It refers to the power of Northern academics to distinguish theory from culture, the universal

⁶ Dados and Connell (2012) and Third World intellectuals linked the term to colony-metropole and core-periphery divides, also see Prashad 2007; Prashad 2012; Dirlik 2007.

⁷ Beverley 2000; Spivak 1988.

from the particular, and disciplinarity from area expertise.⁸ Northern academics authorise such distinctions through institutionally sanctioned performances of grant writing, fieldwork, hypothesis testing, theorising, workshopping, peer reviews, and so on. When southern-located and -positioned individuals theorise, they can only do so on the terms established by Northern vocational standards.

While a preliminary sketch, this conceptualisation of North and Northness can highlight certain characteristics of academic decolonisation. For our purposes, we can use a stylistic schema to focus on three important moments of epistemic decolonisation: three ruptures of colonial conquest, postcolonial arrivals, and transnational convergences. Simply stated, the first rupture birthed Theory and anti-colonial thought, the second decentred Theory and appropriated anti-colonial thought for post/decolonial critique, and the third challenged academia by centring knowledge produced by ongoing anti-imperial movements across the Global South. In a sense, the first rupture emphasises the locational aspect of Northness, the second positional, and the third, vocational.⁹

The schema highlights several issues with projects of Northern epistemic decolonisation. The first issue is a consequence of the first and second ruptures, which introduced a gap between Northern epistemic and Southern political decolonisation. Modern social theory was an outcome of the first rupture of colonial conquest, grounded in the reflections on modernity by some (dead) bearded white men who sometimes ignored and sometimes supported colonialism. Anti-colonial thought also emerged at this time. But the Northness of Theory was effectively challenged during the second rupture, when many later-influential scholars of southern origin migrated to the global North. The moment of *post-colonial arrival* made the *postcolonial arrived* – scholars such as Said, Spivak, Bhabha, Hall, Mignolo, Escobar and others who, as per Arif Dirlik, signalled the conquest of Northern academia by Third World (read: Southern) intellectuals.¹⁰ The postcolonial (and decolonial) theorists critiqued Theory and diversified it by bringing southern anti-colonial thought into the Academy, anointing it with the status of theory proper. Fanon is perhaps the most obvious example of this transformation. In effect, if the first conquest was located in the colonies and primarily amid political struggles, the second was Northern in vocation and location.

This shift had some consequences, none more significant than the primacy of issues of position. While waves of colonisation and imperial rule continued in the ex-colonies, most arrived scholars were distanced and disconnected from the

⁸ Cf. Connell 2018; Jazeel and McFarlane 2007; Rehbein, Kamal and Asif 2020.

⁹ These are detailed in Kamal and Courtheyn (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Dirlik 2002.

actual struggles of the people in the South. In a sense, while the *postcolonial who arrived* provided a foundational critique of elite and nationalist (mis-)representation of the subaltern, they themselves produced high-theory concepts to attempt to represent the subaltern from afar. Their conquest of academia did not counter the earlier waves of colonial conquest, but arguably contributed to ongoing colonial processes. As Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui puts it, they built “pyramidal structures of power and symbolic capital... creating a jargon, a conceptual apparatus, and forms of reference and counterreference that have isolated academic treatises from any obligation to our dialogue with insurgent social forces.”¹¹ Decolonisation became a metaphor,¹² and even elite theorists with power and symbolic capital did not shy away from claiming a marginal (and subaltern) status.¹³ Arguably, the problem is endemic, as the neoliberal university is now recruiting to diversify its workforce, just as other societal actors that even include missile-making and fast fashion capitalist multinationals.¹⁴

A necessary corrective emerged in the third rupture of *transnational convergence*. If the first rupture emphasised South as location, the second South as position, the third rupture emphasised South as a vocation. It was in a way a direct response to the critique of the impact of armchair decolonial/postcolonial scholarship and a recognition that Northern hegemony is centrally tied to the Academy. It refined the critique of the political economy of knowledge and posited activists and communities-in-resistance as valuable sites of knowledge production. The 1994 Zapatistas’ take over in Chiapas was a watershed moment, and their subsequent *encuentros* source-springs of transnational anti-globalisation movements represented in the likes of the Seattle protests and the World Social Forum.¹⁵ Movement thinking inspired scholars who geared up to retrieve subaltern knowledges, southern epistemologies, and pluriversal ontologies – celebrating place-based resistance.¹⁶ Arguably, many northern scholars worked closely with activists and social movements across the global souths and made invaluable contributions to these projects of southern emancipation.

Yet, the theorising from the third encounter strangely led to a fetishisation of both the strictly local and the ethereally planetary or transnational. Many Northern decolonisers mistook their own ability to cross and transcend imperial

11 Rivera Cusicanqui 2012, 97–98.

12 Tuck and Yang 2012.

13 Mignolo 1999, 239–40.

14 Shringarpure 2020.

15 Santos 2006; Zibechi 2004.

16 Blaser 2014; Escobar 2018; Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Santos 2018.

borders with the epistemic and ontological possibility of disregarding borders in their work. Dialogue, convergence, exchanges, and connectivities became the primary and celebrated mechanisms for epistemic decolonisation. Many academics turned to the heuristics of ‘without’ or ‘beyond’ borders – book titles with activists, feminists, doctors, justices (... investors, businesses...) beyond/without borders – making it hard to tell apart the detractors of neoliberalism from their proponents. Some celebrity ‘decolonising’ theorists saw good in the relentless expansion of markets, technology, and consumerism,¹⁷ while others abandoned projects focused on the subaltern to speak of a united common humanity.¹⁸ The colonial encounter seemed to shift – but not from the south to the North, as in the second rupture, nor back to the South, but to an ethereal transnational, global and planetary space.

Today’s southern condition has arguably shifted due to a new conjuncture – not of conquest, arrival or convergence, but one that is best classified as southern isolation or ruination. The current conjuncture does not follow a linear path from conquest to arrival to convergence, but rather contains the overlapping, intersecting and recurring effects of prior ruptures on projects of epistemic decolonisation. Those interested in epistemic decolonisation must attend to this new southern condition.

The theory of Northness can be applied, not to generate a list of the good and bad decolonisers but to delineate a schematic genealogy of Northern projects of epistemic decolonisation. The goal here is to attend to the particular conditions that enable and limit projects of epistemic decolonisation. It would be a mistake to take this theory of Northness as a critique of all projects of decolonisation based in Northern circuits of knowledge production and theorising. Neither does it mean that the only good decoloniser is a southern decoloniser. Northness here is not an identity, but a relational quality, a tendency. To question whether Northerners can decolonise is a pragmatic question of understanding the challenges of position, location, and vocations. The value of contemporary decolonisation projects in the global North is not self-evident, and it might as well be furthering Northern orientation. Perhaps thinking about southern theorising can help elucidate this point.

¹⁷ Mignolo 2012, 287.

¹⁸ Chakrabarty 2014.



Southern theorising entails southern interpretations of southern sources, interpretations that attend to southern societal conditions and can be developed into theoretical concepts to be tested, generalised, and deployed elsewhere. It is one of the ways of generating what can be classified as Southern Theory. Theorising is a question of practice and Theory of product. Thus, hypothetically speaking, we can generate the product of Southern Theory without the practice of southern theorising as defined here. However, I believe that unless we practise southern theorising we are likely to continue to produce theories imbued with a certain Northness.

Let's consider the three most common ways of generating southern theory, defined as theory oriented against the destructive tendencies of the North: internal critiques of Northern Theory; theorising from 'pre-colonial' texts and oral sources; and theory deriving from southern reflections on the colonial encounter. In a sense, these capture the interiority, exteriority, and the interactions of the North-South epistemic divide.

The first path to southern theories is the realm of postcolonial and decolonial critique from the interiority of Northern theory. I have discussed some of the limitations of these in the previous section and elsewhere (Kamal and Courtheyn, *forthcoming*). Even a cursory reading of decolonisation literature shows that most of its proponents draw from the critical and radical traditions of the global North – Said's critique of Marx and Orientalist literature does not need any philosophical or theoretical grounding in southern intellectual traditions; Spivak's analysis of the subaltern is primarily developed through a critical engagement with Marxism, poststructuralism, and feminism. The critique has demonstrably generated 'southern' concepts – for instance, the subaltern and coloniality. However, the primacy of position and struggles for gaining social capital in Northern society can imbue these theoretical endeavours with a certain Northness. What of these is southern is then a question of context-specific testing and southern evaluation.

The second generative source of southern theorising includes a variety of pre-colonial texts and oral traditions.¹⁹ Pre-colonial texts and traditions have always been important for modern scholarship, but orientalist readings relegated these largely to the realm of culture, or viewed them as, at best, philosophical

¹⁹ Here the 'pre' must be read in the sense of 'before the effects of colonialism,' and, in that sense, one can argue that the term is not strictly chronological, in the same vein as the 'post' in postcolonial.

and political treatise. Recent scholars have argued for the theorising potential of these sources, both to counter universalist claims of Western social theories and to generate alternative discourses. For instance, Farid Alatas uses the sociological observations of Ibne-Khaldun to contrast the usual social distinction of urban/rural against *umran badawi/hadari* – a distinction between nomadic and settled folks.²⁰ Similarly, by considering ideas of the individual and community in Yoruba ritualistic poetry, Akinsola Akiwowo attempted to produce a southern theory relying on sources and texts that were neither used by nor accessible to Northern theorists.²¹

The third important source of southern theorising is born out of the colonial encounter. We can see two representative approaches to this. The first is exemplified by Raewyn Connell's 'antipodal reflections' on Ali Shariati, Al-Afghani, and Raul Prebisch. Connell proposes generating southern theoretical concepts by analysing southern reflections on the colonial encounter.²² In general, this approach seeks to excavate theories from the works of elite colonial intellectuals like DuBois, Fanon, Senghor, Gandhi, Iqbal, and others. The second approach relies on the analysis of collective texts and collective action, which represent those types of intellectual production of decolonisation that cannot be reduced to the authority of certain renowned southern intellectuals. Instead, this approach relies on the distinction between individual and collective intellectual production, and even questions the general attribution of collective thought to certain individuals – generally male and elite.²³ Recent examples of this line of work include several essays from the four volumes of *Asking, We Walk* edited by Corrinne Kumar,²⁴ the pluriversal conceptual dictionary by Kothari et al.,²⁵ and collections of knowledges born out of movements such as the texts produced by the Zapatistas.²⁶

These three possible pathways may not always generate a Southern Theory, or multiplicities of southern theories. For instance, the projects of 'connected' or global sociologies²⁷ are consistent with Northern attempts to diversify and expand the sociological canon by including southern perspectives, but from the concerns of Northern (and imperial) societies. In such cases, theories may be

²⁰ Alatas 2014.

²¹ Akiwowo 1986.

²² Connell 2007.

²³ Ahmad 2022.

²⁴ Kumar 2007.

²⁵ Kothari et al. 2019.

²⁶ Cf. EZLN 2016; ELZN 2019.

²⁷ Bhambra, Nisancioglu and Gebrial 2018.

southern (anti-colonial) in one context but Northern in another – for instance, theories of social stratification developed by southern movements in ex-settler, now-imperial societies like the USA, can create a decolonial hegemony and academic dependency when applied to the ex-colonial, now semi-colonial societies like Pakistan. This transformation of what is decolonial in one context to imperial in another occurs primarily through vocational Northness. Most scholars who want to generate southern theory might be aware of issues of academic dependency, yet their reliance on institutionally sanctioned performances of research and theorising can further these dependencies. We see this type of dynamics emerge even among many renowned ‘southern theorists’ of today. Disagreements can be generative, but may have limited value if they are guided by vocational loyalties to the Northern Academy.

My way to sort out these debates is to go back to the issue of the Northness of these projects, and to call for southern theorising. Theorising is a matter of practice. I share Alatas and Chen’s calls for a comparative and cross-fertilising analysis of southern societies with shared historical experiences and conceptual vocabulary. I am attracted to calls for retrieving social movement texts, subaltern voices, and oral traditions as repositories of other knowledges. But all this requires moving away from vocational Northness to southness – particularly by practising theorising with social movements and activists who are fighting an existential battle against the North.

However, the focus on theorising amidst ongoing southern struggles must avoid the traps of reactionary nationalism and cultural relativism. Such problems have marred past attempts of ‘indigenising sociology,’ for instance.²⁸ Anti-colonial theorising cannot rely on past or oral traditions to showcase cultural superiority – this can lead to orientalism-in-reverse.²⁹ Such attitudes are demonstrable in those who refer to Vedic sciences or Quranic suras, for instance, and claim that Western scientific discoveries were already present in these ancient and sacred texts. Sometimes these are right-wing, fascist, nationalist, and culturalist interpretations of southern societies based on civilisational distinctions even if demonstratively non-Eurocentric. Sometimes even well-established Northern scholars are seduced by the musings of those hell-bent on presenting their South as better than the North.³⁰

²⁸ Patel 2021.

²⁹ Al-Azm 2010.

³⁰ For instance, Walter Mignolo’s recent endorsement of a Hindu fascist scholar, or western scholars’ celebration of fascist Islamist ideologues tend to fall into this trap of romanticizing the ‘Southern’ even with their demonstrable affinity with the violence of capital-colonialism. Cf.

Projects of Southern theorising must keep the North in view, unravelling its impact and overcoming the challenges faced by southern scholars. They require renewed vigour and infrastructural investments in southern universities and amidst southern movements. While Southern theorising is, by necessity, anti-colonial, the concepts generated must also be debated and evaluated for their worth to ongoing struggles, and to the people who have existential stakes in these projects. Let me return to the river to make some final observations.

د

ندی مردی بے تاں سُن مٲترا
 اکھیں مردیاں بن دل مردی بے
 سونہہ مردی بے وسوں اپنی دی
 نیلے پائیاں دی گھل مردی بے
 جوڑا ہنساں دا بک نئیں مردا
 پورے دریا دی کھل مردی بے

*When the river dies, my dearest listen!
 The eyes die, the heart dies
 The life of our lifeworlds dies
 The slumber of blue water dies
 It's not just a pair of swans that dies
 But the laughter of the entire river dies.*

These lines from Saraiki poet Ashu Laal lament the death of the rivers in the land of the rivers. When the river dies... what is river death? Many think of river death in terms of pollution and biodiversity loss. Ashu won't disagree, but he will point to modern irrigation started by the British colonisers and continued by the World Bank in pursuit of the 'green revolutions' – in the 20th century 'green' meant intensive capitalist agriculture, and in the 21st century it means mega-dams to 'fight' climate change.

When does a river die? My dearest listen... when it stops flowing... when it is dammed, diverted, and fragmented to support modern lifestyles, capitalist accumulation, and the ongoing colonisation of the lands and peoples of the Indus Valley. As fisher activist Muhammad Ali Shah puts it, the river dies when it is imprisoned and cannot reach its beloved – the ocean, its final destination.

And what happens when a river dies? My dearest listen, says Ashu, our eyes die, our hearts die. And when our eyes die, can we still see and when our hearts die can we still feel? River deaths are visible across the globe, but unlike Climate Change, which is perhaps top of the list in the current anxieties of Northerners, the death of a river doesn't travel beyond the valley. It is not planetary, yet not entirely local either. The death of a river is not captured by Northern theoretical endeavours.

The technology for harvesting air and oceans for freshwater is likely to improve and provide new sources of irrigation to fill the lavish plates of a Northern diet. But river deaths will affect those whose hearts will also die. The *سوں* of our *سوں*... the life of our lifeworld, the grounds of our community, the gathering of our togetherness, will die. And it's not simply a matter of the extinction of a species, nor of low scores on the biodiversity indices, but the loss of the laughter of the entire river.

One cannot be reasonable and be against biodiversity indices and scientific knowledge about the diversity of species and their habitats. Concepts like 'hydro-social,' generated from Northern social sciences, appear to have some influence in natural sciences as well – a decolonising of sorts. Recent work on indigenous cosmologies explores *buen vivir* via alternative and post-developmental models to provide plenty of space for concepts such as 'river life,' 'water is life,' and, in that sense, river health and river death. But of what value is Ashu Laal's lament for the dead river? What value and for whom... for Northerners, southerners, all humanity, the colonised, the arrived? If you ask Ashu, the lament only has value if it leads to the return of life to the river. If that path comes from secular-scientific interventions, well and good. If sacred-tradition knowledge practices can revive the river, our eyes will see again, our hearts will love again.

Ashu's lament lies at the exteriority of Northern epistemologies. But reflections on what constitutes the interiority of Northern theories can also lead to the river – another path to southern theorising. We can take apart theories grounded in European histories and geographies, and confront them with southern conditions. In my work, I have attempted to do so with the theory of river enclosure, drawing from classical theory of land enclosures by Marx and Polanyi and its later uses in the study of new waves of landgrabbing, gene enclosures, patenting, and food sovereignty movements. Starting with a very basic insight that land enclosures in England do not provide an effective model of land enclosures in India and much of the world, I took inspiration from Ashu's verses and river activists in Pakistan and asked: what if we put rivers in the centre of the analyses of land enclosures?

Centring rivers instead of land has enormous generative potential. If Polanyi argued that the Great Transformation in state-society relations came through the

double movement of land enclosures and resistance, one can argue that the view from the south and colonies like British India, Egypt, Australia, and the western United States all demonstrate that the great transformation in land-use and property regimes was only possible by damming, diverting, and in the long run, destroying rivers. While I don't want to go into the details of this theory, some insights immediately emerge. Unhinging the idea of enclosure from land to apply it to rivers draws on a variety of imperial and decolonial theoretical views. From Karl Wittfogel's orientalist view, one can surmise that large irrigation systems in the Orient (India, China) require authoritarian regimes, and from his critics, like Steven Lansing, we learn that the decentralised nature of large irrigation systems in Bali did not require authoritarian centralised states. Donald Worster's work in the western United States shows (despite not claiming it as such) how large irrigation bureaucracies were key to colonial and postcolonial states' establishment of strong centralised control over land and rivers, and so on. One can argue that a theory of river enclosure emphasises the role of authoritarian state and colonial extraction, whereas the theory of land enclosure predicts the arrival of markets and a welfare state. Centering rivers then decenters some of the fundamental debates in modern political economic theories.

Finally, the study of river defence movements can also contribute to current scholarly debates on the notion of indigeneity, alliance formation, the transformation of identities under shifting natural worlds, and ideas of people's sovereignty and law to dismantle states' power performatively through traditional practices. In this analysis of the exteriority, interiority and interactions of the North-south epistemic divide, we can start with simple questions, like: why do some defend rivers while others do not? The answers require full treatment not possible here, but it is worth pointing out that in stories of river activism there's a mix of strategic, creative and meditative choices by activists. One thing that stands out in the comparative analysis of river movements is that activists need to rely on a lot of creativity to be heard and not subalternised. They often do so by investing in a variety of informal and movement infrastructure, and wrestling with issues of representation and self-representation.

I have outlined some preliminary attempts at southern theorising, focusing on rivers, using three types of approaches – reading oral traditions (Ashu's lament), confronting Northern theory with southern conditions (river enclosures), and studying activists creative, strategic, and meditative rationalities. Let me quickly point to some of the challenges of transforming the poetry, meditations and conversations of southern intellectuals and activists into theory proper.

First, despite increased recognition of poetry as a potential source, and of activists as knowledge makers, the transformation of their thought into theory still faces some Northern challenges. For instance, when Akinsola Akiwowo

attempted to generate sociological concepts from Yoruba poetry, other Yoruba speaking scholars objected. Such debates are useful when they are generative, and not when they foreclose the possibility of further elaboration and development of preliminary theories. What interests me is not so much the debate itself, but Raewyn Connell's analysis of it in Chapter 5 of her *Southern Theory*.³¹ Connell, not being versed in Yoruba, can only rely on the authoritative commentary of native scholars, and limits her analysis to the difficulty of generating concepts from oral and poetic traditions due to the ambiguities, uncertainties, and in some sense the untranslatability of these works. All in all, Connell's discussion is representative of perhaps the best a non-native scholar can offer due to their limited linguistic abilities and understanding of sociological context. The challenge of untranslatability becomes foundational to Marisol de la Cadena's study of Andean indigenous cosmologies.³² While Connell could provide limited commentary on the actual sociological or philosophical content, Cadena uses a 'non-dualistic' heuristic of 'not only' to signify the limits of her understanding, particularly when her interlocutor (subject?) Nazario refuses to explain certain things or when de la Cadena reaches the limits of her comprehension because of her weak knowledge of Quechua language. In both the cases, untranslatability becomes an issue, but only since the two books, written in English, are written primarily for Connell and Cadena's Northern interlocutors. The potential for southern theorising is rather left unexplored.

Issues of language and translation take on an added significance when we move away from concerns of vocational northness and locate the southern works in their complex contexts of political decolonisation. Language politics in the southern context are complex, and translation for Northern audiences is replete with challenges. For instance, two North-located projects on Punjab's colonial history, one literary and one in political ecology, subsumed Saraiki language and lands into Punjabi language and administrative division. Arguably, the Saraiki movement is a recent phenomenon, not covered in colonial texts, but the books were published in the last decade when the movement was visible and growing rapidly.

Furthermore, the multi-layered histories of linguistic colonisation mean that many non-European languages may be considered imperial impositions in some cases – for instance, the Arabisation and Persianisation of Indus Valley languages, the hegemony of Urdu as the national language in Pakistan, or the relegation of Saraiki to a dialect of Punjabi. Whose authority are we going to trust now in

31 Connell 2007.

32 De la Cadena 2015.

the selection of local languages – Northern scholars, the State or the dominant if not hegemonic social forces? Are the prioritised languages determined simply by what is on offer in Northern language training schools? Is it up to the preferences of individual scholars?

Demands for translation and then notions of untranslatability or incommunicability hint at the Northness of such projects. In contrast, consider that Ashu's verses are generated in a particular context, and read, sung, debated, and even challenged in the context of a dynamic Saraiki decolonisation movement. A southern theorising project can clearly emerge from there, but it would require significant investments by those who are located in proximity to these movements – both insiders that identify as Saraiki, and outsiders who may speak the language or understand the historic context of the emergence of these thoughts and ideas. The value of Ashu's words is already recognised, though not without criticism, in the Saraiki decolonisation movement. Can we imagine the conversation amidst activists as a spring and source of Southern theorising, before asking of what value it is for Northerners?

Another problem confronts us if we are to think of the 'river enclosure' as a contribution to globalising sociological analysis. While the idea of putting rivers at the centre of the analysis of enclosures may appeal to many Northern academics, others demand rigour in terms of engagement with the very broad and wide literature on enclosures and proximate concepts such as accumulation by dispossession, food sovereignty, land-use shifts, hydrosocial cycles and so on. This is usual academic practice, and valued. But most of these concepts were developed using Northern cases or Eurocentric theories to begin with. Further, their use in academic literature is demonstrably ambiguous and often contradictory.³³ There's then an overproduction of concepts in Northern theorising, often shallow and ambiguous; yet their power is established less by their explanatory merit and more by their authoritative academic performance. Market principles of supply and demand apply to academic labourers, and increasingly result in the familiar crisis of overproduction. Generating southern theory via southern theorising in this context is costly and southerners are incentivised to simply apply and test existing theories. It also requires significant labour to convince Northerners of the value of novel theorising attempts and they lack the contextual knowledge to ascertain this value.

The burden of southern theorising is also to confront these challenges of linguistic labour, translatability, and overproduction, along with issues that others have pointed out: extraversion, academic dependence, captive mind,

33 Das 2017.

gharbzadegi, colonised mind, orientalism in reverse, and so on (in works by Paulin Hountoundji, Hussain Alatas, Jalal Al-i Ahmad, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Sadik Al-Azam, etc.).³⁴

If the condition of southness is a Northern creation through the destruction of a variety of lifeworlds and ways of living the good life, then southern theorising seeks to reflect both on this destruction and the possibility of existence. It is a response to the death and destruction of rivers, a fight against enclosures of nature, a call to regain our linguistic plurality, a desire to engage in dialogue and conversations with southern peoples. But to do so, we need investments in southern infrastructure for theorising. Infrastructure that avoids the traps of the locational, positional, and vocational Northness. That counters the reduction of southern intellectual production to culture, or to mere particularities that do not have universal or multiversal potentials. That counters the overproduction of Northern theory and creates space for southern dialogues and conversations. That puts the theories to test not in closed rooms and academic halls, but amidst the people who have existential stakes in southern struggles. That can provide some autonomy to southern thinkers and prevent their subsumption in state-sanctioned ideas of indigeneity or nativity, or North-oriented ideas of globality, connectivity, or planetarity. That draws lessons from riverine activists who use strategy and pragmatism, coupled with creativity and meditations. That can develop, refine, and transform thought, prose, poetry, and embodied performances into theory.

Otherwise, what good is southern theorising after all?

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34 Hountoundji 1995; Ahmad 1962; Alatas 1974; Thiong’o 1981; Al-Azm 2010.

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Sanya Osha

Marxism, Communitarianism and Communalism in Africa

1

Over one hundred and fifty years after its initial publication, it is difficult to read the effects and influence of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* in the West African region or even in most of the geographical entities that experienced colonialism. Historical materialism is central to Marxist epistemology, but, especially in countries that have experienced colonisation, it needs to be viewed through categories of race and imperialism as well as gender, religion, and nationality. When mediated by these other categories and concepts, historical materialism and Marxist epistemology become less provincial and consequently more universal.

Traditionally, in West Africa, Marxism has been read alongside processes of decolonisation and nation-building. In other words, it has always been assimilated through other seemingly unrelated conceptual lenses which then grant it a distinctive tenor and import quite separate from its original Western location and trajectory.

Nonetheless, Marxism usually holds an allure in most parts of West Africa because of the obvious preference it bestows on a wide variety of subaltern struggles; struggles against colonialism, imperialism, internal economic exploitation, and most recently, corporate globalisation.

There are currently no known translations of *Das Kapital* in any indigenous West African language and yet local histories and conditions are quite receptive to Marxian analyses, transformation, and development.

This essay traces the development of Marxist thought largely in West and East Africa. However, there is also a brief focus on the South African context in addition to the West African communal practice of pawnship. What emerges from this specific trajectory are the slight alterations in praxis that are evident on the two regions of the continent. For instance, in East Africa, there is an evident deployment of the concept of *ujamaa* which may be regarded as an endogenous form of communitarianism and its eventual utilisation in the larger nation-building project, particularly in Tanzania. As mentioned earlier, South Africa also has a strong tradition of Marxist and leftist thought, including the Southern African concept of *ubuntu*, which is highlighted to demonstrate its similarities to *ujamaa*.

Modern African forms of socialism were fashionable during the unravelling of colonialism and the advent of the postcolonial era. It promised a decolonial

future and possibilities that connected a widespread African communal ethos with a decolonising consciousness. In addition, socialist ideology, generally speaking, appealed to formerly colonised African countries intending to break away from their subaltern and neo-colonial status. The former Soviet Union and China did not possess any African colonies and this proved to be in their favour during the Cold War epoch. Socialist thought and ideology not only had similarities with African communal sensibilities but also served the decolonial aspirations of many Africans.

Communalism, communitarianism, and Marxist thought and practice are all addressed in varying degrees to underline the significance of the collective ethos in the organisation of everyday life, formal political practice, and ultimately, in defining the political economy of need. But these general preoccupations are mediated with wide-ranging scenarios depicting important African historical events (such as imperialism, political liberation, decolonisation and neo-colonialism) and significant political actors like Kwame Nkrumah, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Patrice Lumumba, Sekou Touré, Amilcar Cabral, Julius Nyerere and Walter Rodney amongst others. Discussions also revolve around the theories of Ifeanyi Menkiti, a noted African philosopher. Given the diverse and haphazard nature of these various historical events, no attempt is made to develop a neat chronological narrative, and, instead, attention is devoted to the concepts and theorists that are relevant to this discussion. Indeed, rather than chronological predictability, the postcolonial theory trope of hybridity is more appropriate to this context.

This receptivity to Marxian transformation is even more evident in the age of corporate globalisation that forces so-called Third World nations into direly unequal relations of economic organisation and development as producers of cheap raw materials (a heritage of the colonial era) for the post-industrial world, which exports finished products at extortionate prices to the same impoverished Third World countries.

Arguably, apart from African nations with notable settler populations such as South Africa, Namibia and Botswana, and perhaps to a lesser extent Kenya, the capitalist transformation of social and economic relations has not been extensive on the continent. In other words, unlike many parts of Latin America where vibrant peasant and workers' organisations exist, sizeable parts of Africa continue to enjoy the good fortune of being exempt from intensive capitalist development, which makes them better equipped to embrace non-capitalist economic institutions and thus to develop outside the capitalist growth-paradigm.

In most rural communities (the majority of Africa's population continues to reside in rural areas), not the entirety of human existence is monetarised.

Age-old agricultural practices based on seasonal planting and harvesting of basic household crops continue to thrive.

In the context of such subsistence economies, the well-being of the collective (a Marxian leitmotif) is deemed important, which is why a premium is placed on ceremonies such as weddings, burials, and name-giving at birth. Rather than the individual investing significantly in future financial security, the collective takes pride of place as a site of investment.

Land in many rural African communities remains held in communal trust. As long as one needs it and works upon it, it remains in one's possession, but once it falls into disuse, it reverts back to its status as communal property pending its re-allocation to a needy individual.

In 1978, Nigeria's military regime promulgated the Land Use Decree in order to create a uniform system of land allocation and use for the entire country. Through this decree which came into full effect the following year, all the land within the country was, in theory, nationalised.

Timothy, my 88-year-old uncle, had been a subsistence farmer all his life and gave it up some years back due to his advanced age. To my question of who was now farming the land, my late father responded: no one. I then asked who the land would be bequeathed to, and he replied, anyone within the community who needs it. I was gratified with this concept of ownership, which remains largely outside the orbit of capitalist production, marketing and commodification. It also seemed to be devoid of the influence of the country's established nationalisation policy; it also offers a succinct and basic understanding of the concept of need.

This reality could be contrasted with the entry of Cecil John Rhodes into the Southern Africa socio-political context in the 19th century.¹ In his livid search for lucrative mineral deposits such as gold and diamonds, Rhodes embarked on a relentless campaign of rapine that dispossessed countless Southern African indigenes of prime land without compensation. When an aggrieved young chief inquired where he and his people were to live now that their land had been taken from them, he was informed that settlements would be parcelled out to them – to which he could only wonder, how was it possible they would be granted land by foreigners in their own territory?

The effects of Rhodes' concerted campaign of dispossession can still be perceived in Southern Africa, where land reform policies have wreaked untold economic havoc in Zimbabwe and have started having grim repercussions in neighbouring South Africa. The truth of the matter is that those two countries of Rhodesian socio-political design have been constructed on massive dispos-

¹ Nyamnjoh 2016.

session, exploitation, inequality, and legalised authoritarian violence. Key to nation-building and decolonisation is how to revisit the wrongs and the traumatic reverberations of the colonial encounter by addressing the unresolved land question. Apologists of colonialism defend a “let sleeping dogs lie” solution. A decolonising perspective suggests that a nation cannot be built on gross inequalities, dispossession and a blasé acceptance of historical niceties that yield easy and superficial comfort.

The severance from a subsistence culture to one based on extraction and super-exploitation also entailed a devaluation of social life which for decades has increased the commodification of everything from basic amenities such as housing and healthcare to water. Perhaps a case in point is the chaotic scenario of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in which, amid untold amounts of mineral resources, mercenaries from all parts of world wage constant war against competitors and locals in a bid to maintain and control access to those resources. In so doing, they simply leave carnage, misery, squalor and death in their wake.

For a considerable period of time now, scholars have been hammering upon the fact that the state in many African contexts is in steady retreat.² Accordingly, the phenomenon known as “the exit of the state” or “failed state” has been widely reported in regions blighted by insensitive structural-often International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank-induced-adjustment programmes, war and chronic poverty. The reduced capacities of the state have in turn created a gaping institutional vacuum that calls for alternative economic systems quite distinct from global capitalism which is evidently failing.

2

As noted earlier, despite the fact that no translations of *Das Kapital* have been found in West Africa, there exists a strong tradition of Marxist thought in the region, primarily developed during the Cold War era. African Marxists developed their thought and praxis in the crucible of decolonisation and the nation-building project, and this history marked African traditions of Marxism with quite specific accents.

Some West African independence leaders such as Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal opposed Marxist ideology as a basis for nation-building although some critics would argue that his *On African Socialism* is fairly Marxist in its outlook

² Bayart 1999; Ihonvbere 2001; Joseph 1988; Maier 2000.

and intent.³ Other leaders such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, who is a central figure in African socialist thought, modified scientific materialism in consonance with the ethos of African communal living.

However, West Africa has arguably produced the most rigorous Marxist activist of the postcolonial period in the figure of Amílcar Lopes Cabral (1924–1973) of Guinea-Bissau. Cabral founded the *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC) in the 1950s to rid the West African coast of Portuguese colonialism. Cabral was not only a theorist of liberation; he was also an indefatigable activist who lost his life in the struggle for freedom. Notably, Marxist thought in the struggle for African liberation was promoted in varying degrees by Modibo Keita of Mali, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana,⁴ Julius Mwalimu Nyerere of Tanzania,⁵ Gamel Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Sekou Touré of Guinea, Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria and possibly early Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. However, African leaders of Marxist persuasion – particularly Nkrumah of Ghana and Touré of Guinea – encountered serious problems in instrumentalising Marxist principles, as Ghanaians and Guineans respectively were headed in a different direction from their renowned leaders.

Ghanaian and Guinean citizens demanded improved market conditions to advance their business and agricultural interests based on established patterns of interregional commerce while these two leaders (Nkrumah and Touré) opposed them and yet imposed taxes and levies on them. Evidently, the difference in outlooks and expectations between the leaders and their citizens posed a conceptual and practical difficulty. Another difficulty arose from the leaders' attempts to synthesise Marxist principles along with African dynamics. First, there was resistance to Western ideas within the context of fractious decolonisation and nation-building processes, and so it was sometimes difficult to separate Marxism from its historical reality as, when all was said and done, it is a foreign-inspired ideology. Nonetheless, given these challenges, Marxist thought was often employed in the struggles against imperialism, since virtually all colonisers in the African continent adhered to, or rather were conscripted to, forms of peripheral or metropolitan capitalism.

Other challenges were posed by the entrenchment of Islam and Christianity in most parts of the continent, which often conflicted with Marxian modes of analysis and development. Indeed, the African intelligentsia encountered a host of

³ Senghor 1964; Senghor 1998.

⁴ Nkrumah 1962; Nkrumah 1963; Nkrumah 1964; Nkrumah 1970.

⁵ Nyerere 1962a; Nyerere 1962b; Nyerere 1963; Nyerere 1967a; Nyerere 1967b; Nyerere 1968; Nyerere 1969; Nyerere 1973; Nyerere 1976.

problems in implanting Marxist ideology in African soil. In institutional terms, the one-party structure favoured by communist states appealed to African nationalist leaders due to its relatively easy accommodation of state authoritarianism.⁶

Authoritarianism was deemed the most convenient way to foster national unity amongst rival ethnicities, religions and competing nationalist visions. Also, it was believed that it provided the most suitable structural base for the advent and functioning of a ‘messianic’ strong man. However, not unexpectedly, this approach frequently resulted in gross abuses, repression, and arbitrariness as in Nkrumah’s Ghana and Touré’s Guinea, which some far-sighted leaders came to understand to be a flawed approach.

Instructively, Polycarp Ikuenobe advocates a gerontocracy instead of modern democratic norms.⁷ If authoritarianism has a positive veneer within the space of “conventional” traditionalism, it obviously does not when viewed alongside the contemporary politics of governance in Africa or anywhere else for that matter. Indeed, it is often argued that the notion of authoritarianism itself is antithetical to the democratic project. Interestingly, some Confucian and Islamic thinkers approve of political meritocracy.

3

When discussing the articulation of Marxist theory and practice across the African continent, it is possible to take a broad view, since African nations experienced similar histories relating to slavery, modernity, colonialism, imperialism, decolonisation and nationhood. These various processes and histories depart from the Western experiences of Marxism. African socialist leaders have thus modified Marxist theory and practice to suit local African conditions.

In addition, the penetration of global capitalism in Africa has been quite uneven and, in regions of resource scarcity, has sometimes been remarkably minimal. This situation has left many parts of the continent hanging on a precipice between potential Marxian re-definition, on the one hand, and a definitive capture by global capitalism, on the other.

Earlier, we noted that in many parts of Africa, a far-reaching monetarisation of rural economies has not occurred and so there exist forms of exchange that are presently outside the strictly capitalist orbit. At independence, this state of

⁶ Murove 2009.

⁷ Ikuenobe 2006.

affairs did not translate into a genuine institutionalisation of indigenous modes of governance. Instead what occurred was a wholesale adoption of the ambiguous structure of the colonial state – the central feature of colonial administration – as the main instrument of postcolonial governance.

Marxists and socialists favoured this approach to governance because in several ways, it resembled the one-party state formations of communist countries of the Eastern Bloc. It also provided an ideological alternative to Western liberalism. As mentioned earlier, these one-party state structures often led to abuses of power in stifling dissent and the repression of populations. These abuses notwithstanding, the socialist vision of society was a welcome relief to many peoples of African descent both on the continent and in the diaspora, as it provided a vision of hope and liberation from centuries of European imperialism and degradation.

The emergence of the Soviet Union as a global superpower after World War II had a considerable impact on Third World nations embarking on the course of decolonisation. Soviet scholars invested immense intellectual energy in analysing the historical transition from anti-colonialism to a supposedly class-less society. In other words, processes of African decolonisation resonated resoundingly with rigorous Marxist analyses.

Nonetheless, these communist readings of African history and developmental processes proved fallacious. All over the continent, pockets within the bourgeoisie arose in the place of colonial administrations and largely extended the dialectic of colonialism, paving the way for what was termed neo-colonialism by Nkrumah.⁸ The expected emergence of a vibrant proletariat to act as an advance guard of the forces of change and revolution did not occur. This development perplexed Soviet scholars who had pontificated on African historical processes.

However, the Soviet scholars were correct in one crucial regard.⁹ They predicted the advent of neo-colonialism even before Nkrumah. Neocolonialism means a more refined stage of colonialism in which African countries continue to suffer economic – and often political – dependency through the dominance and manipulation of international trade and monetary systems by the West. The ploy, it was argued, was to keep African nations in a state of underdevelopment via a prefabricated system of patronage and inequitable economic exchange.

Visionary and progressive African leaders who resisted this unequal international economic order were viciously attacked and sometimes killed, as in the case of Patrice Lumumba of the Republic of Congo. Lumumba met his demise in

⁸ Mudimbe 1988.

⁹ Cf. Mudimbe 1988.

the hands of Joseph-Desire Mobutu aided by United States-owned Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Mobutu eventually headed one of the most kleptomaniac and most brutal regimes in Africa.

The unfair global economic order elicited Marxist-Leninist critiques everywhere. African leaders such as Senghor of Senegal came under harsh criticism for not being adequately rigorous. Senghor, in particular, was criticised for his mild variant of socialism which sought to equate African communal ethos with scientific socialism. He was also vilified for his apparently romantic essentialisation of the African subject, whom he projected not as an agent of history but rather as a victim of historical stasis.¹⁰

Nkrumah, on the other hand, was recognised as a more authentic socialist in promoting anti-colonialist struggles all over the continent (unlike Senghor) and accepting the centrality of class struggle as a critical factor in historical processes and the emancipation of the individual.

However, even Nkrumah encountered enormous difficulties in achieving the socialist dream as a result of a variety of conceptual challenges. First of all, there was an unresolved tension between pursuing a pan-Africanist project, on the one hand, and focusing solely on Ghana's national interests, on the other. Nkrumah also complained that Ghana lacked a sufficient number of committed socialists to effect radical socioeconomic transformation. Finally, his rigid authoritarian posture eventually alienated him from the mass of the Ghanaian people and subsequently paved the way for his overthrow. The collapse of the Nkrumah administration in the 1960s caused widespread disillusionment in relation to the burgeoning pan-African dream and in African Marxist circles.

However, Nkrumah's understanding of Marxist and socialist thought was mediated by an equally robust familiarity with African American political theory, notably Marcus Garvey's *Philosophy and Opinions* and of course George Padmore's conception of Pan-Africanism.¹¹ Indeed, his rather eclectic temperament led him to study the lives and careers of political figures such as Hannibal, Cromwell, Napoleon, Mazzani, Gandhi, Mussolini and Hitler.

V. Y. Mudimbe agrees that the brutality and great disillusionment caused by World War II made African political thinkers re-examine Western notions of progressive humanism. Between the 1930s and 1950s, Mudimbe claims that Marxism was the single most important influence on African political thought.¹²

¹⁰ Soyinka 1996; Soyinka 2012; *International Socialist Review* 2001.

¹¹ Mudimbe 1988, 88.

¹² *Ibid.*, 90.

As for Senghor, in spite of the fact that he had numerous critics, he can be said to exercise considerable intellectual influence in Francophone Africa. Senghor attempts to synthesise *negritude* with Marxist humanism in a markedly dialectical manner in order to arrive at a universal civilisation.¹³ In pursuing this particular intellectual operation, Senghor draws on the ideas of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Mudimbe asserts that Senghor's ideas deserve more sympathetic critical reception. The cause of his constant vilification by his intellectual contemporaries stems from his contrasting black emotion (rhythm) with ancient Greek rationality as exemplified in the famous axiom, "I am the Other...therefore I am."¹⁴ This Senghorian *negritudist* formulation is strikingly similar to the Southern African concept of *ubuntu*, which posits, roughly, "I am because of you."

Mudimbe also points out that "Nyerere's socialism is probably the most pragmatic of all African socialisms."¹⁵ On his part, Nyerere argues that socialism and democracy are central in traditional African existence. *Ujamaa*, which translates as "family-hood" defines African socialism. But furthermore, "*ujamaa* means above all that a nation based on the socialist project would imply a constant development of communalism for all peoples."¹⁶ Nyerere, through his political party, formally launched his socialist agenda via the *Arusha Declaration* in 1967. In relation to Tanzania's socialist political project, Mudimbe notes:

The creed presents the rationale of *ujamaa*. In the first part, it describes the major values (sharing, equality, rejection of alienation and exploitation of man by man, etc). In the second part, it offers as ideological deductions its main political objectives. These are: first, the independence of the nation, but a socialist nation governed by a socialist government; second, cooperation with African countries and commitment to the liberation of Africa and her unity; and third, improvement of the conditions of equality and life in the nation and, therefore, nationalisation of the means of production and the political control of the fields of production.¹⁷

Indeed, African Marxists have had to discover ways of fusing Marxist thought with African historical realities and future political objectives. It always seems necessary to indigenise or 'traditionalise' Marxism according to African aspirations. And fortunately, there have been practical instances where this task seemed feasible. As such, "Africa seems to hesitate between two principal

¹³ Mudimbe 1988, 94.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

sources, Marxist and traditionalist, and to worry endlessly about the evidence about the superiority of the Same over the Other and the possible virtues of the inverse relationship.”¹⁸ This seemingly implacable relationship between Marxism and traditionalism has found varying expressions in Padmore’s *Panfricanism or Communism*, Nkrumah’s critique of neo-colonialism, and various formulations of Islamic humanism. As noted, Nkrumah encountered disastrous consequences in finding practical expression for his peculiar blend of socialist principles and Africanism, in part because of his counterproductive political choices.

4

During the 1970s, a new crop of Afro-Marxists emerged.¹⁹ This group of socialists, emerging in the wake of the attainment of independence from Portuguese colonial rule by five Lusophone nations, were to be found principally in Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cabo-Verde, Sao Tomé e Príncipe and Angola. They believed that in order for the socialist project to succeed in Africa, there must be a two-pronged attack on the local bourgeoisie and their external allies. Nonetheless, this generation of African socialists was just as authoritarian and as repressive as the Nkrumah or Touré regimes. Under the guise of so-called ‘scientific socialism,’ gross human rights violations were committed and shades of political pluralism were suppressed.

If the school of Afro-Marxists faltered on the question of praxis, at least one figure accomplished considerable success in conceptually synthesising a vision of pan-Africanist struggle, a notion of the Global South (although this might not have been a popular term then), a history of slavery and African underdevelopment, and a radical critique of the present by employing primarily a Marxist mode of analysis. Walter Rodney’s landmark work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, continues to serve as a potent blueprint for decolonisation.²⁰

As we have observed, for Marxist thought to resonate with African political aspirations and the masses, it must be able to factor in the history of slavery, rigorous critiques of imperialism and global capitalism, an alignment with African pre-capitalist modes of production, and finally, a decolonised historiography of the present. Only when these particular local conditions are accepted

18 Mudimbe 1988, 96.

19 Falola 2001.

20 Rodney 1969; Swai 1981; Swai 1982.

does the Marxist project of a class-less society become attractive and ultimately realisable.

Having provided sketches of prominent West African nationalist leaders with a notably socialist persuasion such as Nkrumah, Touré, Cabral and Senghor, it can be argued that the most effective laboratory of Marxist thought on the continent was the famous Dar es Salaam school of radical history. This school of history attempted to invent a historiography based on subaltern ideology and aspirations away from prior colonialist – and evidently bourgeois – orientations which were perceived as an undeniable extension of the European imperialist project.²¹

In fact, the entire idea of a decolonised historiography of the present in Africa can be traced to the Dar es Salaam collective of radical history which spawned vigorous debates on neo-Marxist epistemology. Central to these debates were of course Rodney – radical Guyanese scholar and activist – Issa Shivji,²² Mahmood Mamdani,²³ Dani W. Nabudere,²⁴ and perhaps to a lesser extent, Claude Ake,²⁵ the late Nigerian social scientist. Undoubtedly, under the inspirational shadow of Nyerere, the Dar es Salaam School went on to have a profound intellectual impact on various schools of African decolonisation that emerged in Dakar, Ibadan, Makerere and Nairobi.

Unfortunately, this influence has been vitiated by neo-colonialism, structural adjustment programmes, virulent conflicts in different regions of the continent, and the venality of various corrupt political leaders, all of which combined has resulted in what has been defined as ‘the retreat of the state,’ the general evisceration of civil society, leading to the unhealthy disconnect between state, society and market in sites undergoing the problems just enumerated. In instances where the state has been rendered ineffective, various formations of civil society with varying levels of efficacy have developed, and increasingly it is to them that citizens look for guidance, succour, and community. And perhaps more than atrophied states, they provide the foundation for the re-education and reconstruction of African communities.

For instance, in South Africa, where there is long history of socio-political activism, civil society plays a prominent role in initiating and pursuing a wide variety of causes, ranging from HIV/Aids activism to agitations for decent basic

²¹ Falola 2001.

²² Shivji 1970; Shivji 1973.

²³ Mamdani 1976; Mamdani 1990; Mamdani 1996; Mamdani 2001; Mamdani 2004; Mamdani 2006.

²⁴ Nabudere 2004.

²⁵ Ake 1979; Ake 1983.

housing to struggles for portable water. Similarly, in Senegal, people are finding alternative ways to solve the problem of urban refuse disposal or the challenges of accessing the larger world through commerce and trade. These efforts and activities are often pursued without recourse to government channels, consequently creating unconventional – often heretical – sites of capital, power, agency and mobility.

Indeed, a discussion of communism or Marxism has to include an account of the South African Communist Party (SACP), which attained its centenary in 2021. Tom Lodge's *Red Road to Freedom: A History of the South African Communist Party* (2021) traces the formation, travails, triumphs, and setbacks of the organisation over the course of its varied history, beginning in the era of *rooi gevaar*, when the South African regime was convulsed by anti-communist hatred. For the most part, the SACP was illegal, and its records were kept secret. Lodge claims he encountered “a wall of silence” when he first attempted researching its history.²⁶

After being unbanned in 1990, the SACP entered the era of *glasnost* and the shroud of secrecy gradually evaporated. Lodge was then able to understand the role the SACP played in nudging the African National Congress (ANC) towards a stance of non-racialism. However, just a year after its formation in 1922, the SACP had been compelled to support a mass of all-white striking mineworkers in a bid to foster a militant insurrectionist movement. Lodge is unable to conclude that Nelson Mandela was ever a registered communist even though he attended meetings of the party between 1960–62 as a member of the central committee.

Regarding some of the setbacks of the SACP, Lodge argues that more could have been done in reducing chronic inequality and integrating South Africa into the industrial milieu of the post-apartheid era. More also could have been accomplished in creating better employment opportunities and addressing the urgent demands of land reform. In addition, in a way, the SACP's alliance with the ANC has imposed a nationalist ideology that may not always work to its advantage in securing its legacy as a veritable political force. All of this became apparent as the party celebrated its hundred-year anniversary.

5

It would be interesting to trace a political economy of need and desire in its early capitalist forms in West Africa (a region I am most familiar with), more speci-

²⁶ Lodge 2021.

fically among the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria and the eastern parts of the Republic of Benin. However, it ought to be noted that the Yoruba can also be found in Sierra Leone and a few other West African countries due to migration and the transatlantic slave trade.

Before the advent of full-blown westernisation in their territories, an established mode of socio-economic relations was already in place. The Yoruba, for instance, placed a premium on material wealth, numerous children and good health and longevity as the ultimate criteria for the attainment of the good life. And so they expended most of their energies in attaining those goals.²⁷

Nonetheless, the acquisition of material wealth is underpinned by a strict moral code. The pursuit of material gain had to be done honourably and not in an unscrupulous manner. As such, no one ordinarily, would approve of *owo igbo* (dirty money or ill-gotten gain) or conduct unbecoming of an *omoluabi* (a fundamentally well-bred person). In order to gain possession of material wealth there were a number of trades and professions the Yoruba were known for; agriculture, fishing, hunting and blacksmithing were some of the more widespread pursuits. However, for most, the acquisition of the requisite levels of wealth was not always attainable. And so there were other social measures and instruments to cushion financial hard times. There was the institution of pawnship – indeed a communal practice – for instance, whereby poor households handed out their children to wealthier families as guarantees for loans. In several instances, these loans were not repaid and so the pawned children could be retained indefinitely. The colonial authorities frowned upon this practice, viewing it as akin to slavery or as an undeniable form of child abuse and eventually abrogated it in the 1920s.

However, most Yoruba viewed the institution of pawnship differently. Instead, they argued that pawnship often led to the acquisition of much-needed skills and professional experience. Furthermore, it also promoted widely accepted methods of socialisation for the child into the culture. Under the practice of pawnship, the fostered child could learn the intricate mysteries of the Yoruba language and traditions.

It ought to be stressed that pawnship was not as severe a practice as slavery. Slaves were treated much more harshly and enjoyed fewer (if at all) rights and privileges. However, both pawns and slaves were employed by powerful households to further develop their socio-political status and economic muscle. The point being that, pawns and slaves were employed by dominant families to augment their socioeconomic status in precolonial times. In quite distinct ways, this defined a certain political economy of need and financial desire. It also deline-

²⁷ Falola and Akinyemi 2016.

ated the modes of social stratification at crucial historical moments. These were arguably during simpler economic times when the political economy of need, want and desire were considerably less complexified or rather less diversified.

The advent of the colonial economy, on the other hand, introduced a new element of economic activity into the scene: the cash crop meant for export. Agriculture was still the mainstay of the economies of Yoruba land. Cocoa had been introduced by colonial adventurers, and Yoruba agriculturists were strongly encouraged to undertake its commercial cultivation for export. Palm oil was also adopted as an export crop. In exchange for the export of those crops, Yoruba agriculturists and merchants were able to gain access to European products, which obviously impacted heavily on the political economy of need, want and desire in both direct and implicit ways. Furthermore, it sparked a scramble for new economic possessions, many of which were not available locally.

In addition, the European encounter had led to the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade, which radically transformed the local economic arena in not only re-drawing the parameters of individual and collective desire but also the range of products that were desirable for both import and export. Yoruba land and indeed the whole of the West African region were hurled into a destabilising vortex of global pillage, looting, human theft and generalised immiseration that changed forever the course of history including entire economies, agricultural practices, commercialised industry, and epistemic paradigms. Many local economic activities became directly linked to the global trade in slaves and its multiple ramifications.

Nonetheless, some pre-existing forms of socioeconomic relations and sociality still prevailed. As such, there was an underlying philosophy of sociality still at work even as an externally engendered socioeconomic transformation was occurring. The social bond was essentially created through the centripetal movement of various assorted parts towards a nucleus of consummation and ultimately, psychic fulfilment. In other words, the individualised, disaggregated self or unit, as the case may be, does not amount to much unless united with the larger social network. This epistemological, sociological and ethical paradigm, as noted previously, is enshrined in many African folk philosophies such as the *ubuntu* principle which simply states, “I am because we are.”

6

Polycarp Ikuenobe writes that “the idea of communalism in African traditions as analysed here represents a normative theory about what a moral person, commu-

nity, and their connection ought to be according to African thought systems.”²⁸ He then proceeds to reiterate the famous Africa proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child” which is increasing becoming a problematic axiom given the processes of rapid urbanisation and informalisation occurring in many African contexts.

Due the often unsettling dynamics of change, social and political transformation, the typical African village can no longer be regarded as being stable and immune to violent transitions and disruptions wrought by capitalism and globalisation. In this regard, Ikuenobe’s almost romantic characterisation of the typical African rural setting fails to account to processes of urbanisation and transitions that accompany them. This drawback stems from seeking to ascribe a normative standard to what would be regarded as a typical African village based on gerontocracy, rusticity, and relative cultural stasis.

Ifeanyi Menkiti, in turn, points out that the idea of community in the current era can be defined from two basic perspectives.²⁹ The notion of community as a primordial construct in which blood ties, more than anything else, constitute the basis of identity, belonging and conviviality. In other words, the community rather than the individual assumes precedence in the formation and consolidation of the social bond. In the other perspective, which is arguably postmodernist, the individual assumes sole responsibility in the constitution of personal identity and in time, an accumulation of multiple private identities is able to form a new autonomous community devoid of a primordial foundation or undue ethnic-related sentiment.

We may, however, further complicate the notion of community by introducing yet another element: the socialist imperative. In this regard,

communism, we understand as a political ideology, stretching out the idea of the communal, with governance as its focus. Communitarianism is a word that is often mentioned. Communitarianism, although it also plays with the idea of the communal, is not itself a political ideology. It could become a political movement if the right conditions arose in which case communitarianism and communism would become very much the same thing.³⁰

Menkiti goes on to identify two different philosophical traditions, with

European philosophy, it seems that the idea of the dignity of the human person continues to be an abstract idea, a sort of arithmetical affair, having to do with the individuated spaces

²⁸ Ikuenobe 2006, 53.

²⁹ Menkiti 2017.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 469.

discreet individuals occupy. For African philosophy, on the other hand, it tends to be lived in dignity, an affair of experience, connected to the ongoing activities of the social whole.³¹

Arguably, the sanctity of the human person tends towards abstraction, improbably objectified, perhaps, in the similar manner as the state as an entity would tend to be. The evidence of this proposition is to be found in Eurocentric philosophy generally. In African philosophy, a different picture emerges whereby the sanctity of the human person struggles to maintain a continually (re)affirmed relation to the social compact in an ongoing experience that tends to be continually re-lived as if to underscore its innate and ever-mobile vitality.

Menkiti proceeds to stress that modern nation-states are not really nations in the sense that they are more or less artificially created geographical constructs devoid of the common lived ordinary experience of their inhabitants. He goes on to state that the ancestry of the so-called primitive ‘tribes’ of Africa contain and maintain deep sources of identity that are unique and probably unmatched, as regards to the depths of their purity, by other nations groups from elsewhere.³² However, Menkiti also avers that colonial constructs such as Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania or the Congos are not by any stretch the ideal examples of what could be called nations in the lived or experiential sense of the term.

Nonetheless, one could argue that Menkiti’s notion of a nation lacks adequate empirical evidence or sufficient historicity. Even during the protohistoric epoch, identity-formation processes were always likely to be undergoing centripetal and centrifugal proclivities depending on the prevailing circumstances. An identity is not formed against a background of a historical, political, or cultural vacuum. Instead, it is created in relation to other contesting myriad identities (dominant or otherwise) and social and political factors and forces that simultaneously accentuate and impede the formation of such an identity.

Menkiti faults the ideologies of both Soviet Russia and capitalist America as being counterintuitive to the idea of community. Communism had sought to construct a notion of utopia out of an artificial abstraction of social classes and workers minus the ever-persistent centrality of the individual, that is, the physical presence that ultimately makes the idea of community even possible in the first place. Capitalism assumes that the individual is merely an agglomeration of private appetites, essentially self-sufficient and intrinsically to be valued above the community. In this sense, both communism and capitalism are unable to strike a balance between the individual and the community. In other words, if

³¹ Menkiti 2017, 468.

³² *Ibid.*

communism fabricates a utopian abstraction of community devoid of the inherent centrality of the individual, capitalism, on the other hand, situates the individual on a pedestal as an almost absolute singularity. Under both ideologies, therefore, and in differing ways, both the individual and the community are most certainly artificial or quasi-artificial constructs. Menkiti then concludes that for more accurate examples of both the individual and the community, the rest of the world ought to look within Africa. Of course, such an assertion needs to be supported by conclusive findings of sociological research which, being a philosopher, he neglects to supply.³³

Conclusion

We may then conclude by stating that the question of survival defines our most basic of needs: food, shelter, health, and clothing. As the abilities to cater to these needs and demands increase, layers of economic and social stratification emerge which in turn make societies supposedly more complex. However, this may not necessarily be for the better but rather at the cost of blurring the lines between need, want and desire. Indeed, the ultimate capitalist revolt may in fact be the blurring of the lines between need, want and desire.

In focusing on the institution of pawnship in precolonial Yoruba society, we are, hopefully, able to identify a certain political economy of need before a complete immersion into the global capitalist economic system. Within this given epoch, human needs were arguably less complexified and perhaps encountered less social stratification. However, in the postcolonial dispensation after a more direct entry in the phases of late capitalism, far-reaching socioeconomic transformations have since occurred.

But unlike in the West, where the state remains relatively stable and entrenched, vast areas of the African continent are insufficiently governed, subject to subversive and arbitrary configurations of power and the unfortunate realities found in failed states. And so, under these exceptional circumstances, the political economy of need would necessarily be defined by contingencies pertaining to security of life and property, adequate and reliable healthcare, access to food, water and shelter, after which other needs of modern human existence may follow. Clearly, a stark survivalism is present in everyday life and often mediates the nebulous divide between life and death in a startling context replete

33 See Menkiti 2017.

with colour, vibrancy, conviviality, unpredictability and ultimately, hybridity. These basic realities are evident in the contestations between African forms of communalism and Marxist principles, peripheral and metropolitan economies, westernisation and endogeneity, science and technology versus mysticism etc. Furthermore, this much is clear after such an eclectic discussion of Marxism, socialist praxis, communalism and communitarianism, the concepts of *ubuntu* and *ujamaa*, histories of West African pawnship amongst others, including the basic imperatives of human need.

This discussion has attempted to focus on a multiplicity of epistemic strains dealing with the communal or collectivist ethos in their precolonial and modern variants. This discursive and ideological terrain is often marked by considerable hybridity, transition, and the dynamics of change. It also borders on processes of imperialist onslaught and the kinds of resistance they elicit. African communities were hurled into matrices of global capitalist expansion in both involuntary and voluntary modes and the outcomes of these transitory scenarios have been shaped by different degrees of social acceptance and resistance. This account has also attempted to highlight the levels of complexity involved in these socio-political and economic transitions from a hybrid and, hopefully, decolonial perspective which further complicates prevailing views on supposedly peripheral forms of capitalism.

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Prince K. Guma, Grace Akello and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni
Forum I: Decolonising Academic Cooperation

With an Introduction by Prince K. Guma and Andrea Fleschenberg

Part of our network collaborations as *co²libri: conceptual collaboration – living borderless research interaction* were a series of fishbowl or workshop talks to enact conceptual collaboration as a foundational dialogical principle. These conversations were held digitally, due to pandemic circumstances, as part of monthly meetings of the working group “Thinkers and Theorising from the South” organised by Kai Kresse. Through such talks, as well as in other modes, we aim to: (1) rethink theory/-ies (in terms of alternative conceptual frameworks and baselines); (2) develop and cultivate visions of globally more fair and adequate research practices in light of southern perspectives or as Akello and Beisel argue, listening to the weaker side;¹ and (3) explore the potentials of genuine conceptual collaboration across disciplines, locations and positionalities. Adding to this is our shared conviction that wide-ranging global north-centred knowledge productions and their underlying paradigms, and us as actors in a complex and multi-layered matrix, have an obligation to reflect on our contributions to present-day academic hegemonies.

This forum documents one of our many conversations. It took place in October 2021 via a videoconference with colleagues participating from MENA countries, South- and East Africa, South- and South-East Asia to Europe, and was moderated by Sandra Calkins, assistant professor at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Free University Berlin. The foundations for this rich and thought-provoking conversation were three discussion papers, in which the authors engage with African academia and their diverse, wide-ranging, complex positionings and interactions within wider regimes of (trans)regional geopolitics of knowledge-production and research cooperation: Prince K. Guma, a post-doctoral research associate at the Urban Institute at the University of Sheffield, UK, who delves further into the material underpinnings, i.e., infrastructures, of academic cooperation and issues of incompleteness; Grace Akello, professor of medical anthropology at Gulu University, Uganda, who shares her experiences and dilemmas observed during various scientific collaborations; and Sabelo

1 Akello and Beisel 2019.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, professor and chair for epistemologies of the global south at the University of Bayreuth, Germany, who reflects, in exemplary ways, on lingering obstacles to genuine north-south collaboration and subsequent ways of decolonising collaboration.

Thus, the three experiences documented here all focus in complementary ways on the problematique of north-south research and academic collaboration, highlighting different perpetuations of hegemonic power relations, systemic inequalities and privilege, and the need for transformative methodological and theoretical models of exploration, along with the need for transformative change and adaptation. Ultimately, this narration aims to problematise and disrupt colonial ramifications experienced by colleagues from the south. In his contribution, Guma begins from the premise that, on the one hand, we must acknowledge the incompleteness of intellectual loops, circuits and pursuits in academia. On the other hand, we must recognise the problematic geopolitical asymmetries in academic knowledge-production in the context of complex and unbalanced relations of and circulations between the global north and global south. He highlights wide-ranging propositions for countering completist pursuits and calibrating collaborative infrastructures of knowledge production in the generation, sharing and maintenance of scientific work and knowledge in the academy. Taking the notion of ‘knowledge infrastructures,’ he argues that it is important to build, facilitate and sustain efforts beyond institutional frameworks – such as dialogues, engagements and endeavours – especially of a type that highlights the need for south-south (in addition to north-south) connections and mutual trust for re-thinking theory, academic practices, and research methods and ethics. In concluding, he proposes possible pathways for consideration beyond critique. These include: countering teleological accounts and approaches; appreciating the plurality and co-existence of knowledges; operationalising theoretical pluralism; researching not simply by documenting but also by theorising; opening up ‘inquiry’ to new dimensions and forms of articulation; decolonising and diversifying pedagogies against the backdrop of an already hegemonic sphere of knowledge production; and sorting out asymmetrical relations in academia through introspection, self-critique, and sensitivity towards the work of power.

Beyond the need for strengthening the material infrastructures of collaboration, Akello addresses the human aspect (us/ourselves) of collaborations. Drawing from her own medical anthropological background and observations about how grants are managed, Akello asks questions of ethics² in researching Africa, highlighting several stereotypes and biases that complicate further col-

² Akello 2019.

laboration in the global realm where academic work is barely a levelled playing field. Akello rightly argues that north-based scientists wield power over their south-based collaborators even when scientists from the south tend to make significant contributions to these projects. She shows how the unequal distribution of funds and allocations between northern and southern partners highlights the economic and social imbalance between them. Basing resource allocation on GDP, FTE and the annual income of the collaborator in the south means that the southern collaborator, regardless of their seniority, will do more work for the project, yet earn much less compared to the researcher in the north. Akello argues that this deep-rooted imbalance is further perpetuated by the fact that the methodology espoused, evidence needed, and what is regarded as scientific outputs, will be an embodiment of various forms of inequality. Guidelines concerning what is science, how to apply them, and who will lead, manage or systematically report about the grant still reflect a systemic perpetuation of inequality. Akello highlights some complex challenges concerning the available grants which, while appearing to be neutral, apolitical and value free on paper, are in reality creating and perpetuating unequal partnerships. Accordingly, she encourages us to mobilise different knowledges and to be more humane, in addition contending that scientific research must mitigate global challenges of inequality; this is why researchers participating in north-south collaborations must constantly be on the alert to recognise perpetuations of inequality.

Finally, with regard to this debate, Ndlovu-Gatsheni draws our attention to issues that are not only structural/infrastructural (as in Guma's contribution) and humane/ethical (as in Akello's contribution) in nature, but more ideational, epistemic, and ontological in character. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, like Guma, engages with the concept of incompleteness, extending its use beyond the realm of (knowledge) infrastructures toward the realm of convivial scholarship. Ndlovu-Gatsheni highlights aspects of collaboration and partnership both as a geographic and social locus mediated by colonial matrices of power, and sustained by unequal hierarchies of power and a division of intellectual labour in the current global economy of knowledge (as highlighted by Akello). This undermines the possibilities of collaboration. While new concepts of 'knowledge society,' 'network society' and 'technological society' are imperative in characterising the global economy of knowledge production in the world, it is important to re-characterise this global economy more realistically. To this end, Ndlovu-Gatsheni draws us toward questions of how to realise 'genuine' and sustainable collaborations and partnerships; how to realise just structural changes; and how to contend with fallacies of completeness and perfection, and commit to the imperative of collective imaginations and interconnections and partnerships and collaborations beyond 'easy victories' in the 21st century.

These three contributions all emphasise that we must seek to build networks and partnerships collectively, incrementally and continuously while countering eminent challenges of north-south research collaboration introspectively, intentionally, and sensitively. They all point to the need for further engagement on some of the most pertinent questions like: how to counter asymmetric relations in academia; how to realise equitable collaboration; and how to further address the pertinent questions around power, systemic inequality, differentiation and hierarchization through (and beyond) decolonising and countering completist pursuits.

Prince K. Guma

Impulse One: The Incompleteness of Scientific Knowledge

There is a tendency in academia to depict occurrences in developing contexts as adverse, divergent and outside of the norm. Many scholars and practitioners tend to misrepresent such occurrences as deficient, failed and inadequate. While some evince faith in a type of blue print solutions, best practices, and idyllic models as panacea for *success*, others seek mechanisms of repair, renovation, and demolition or realignment as *solutions*. Impassioned with the endeavour for solutions and success, most scholars barely look beyond neoliberal-level precarity and compliance in their explorations. Within the social sciences, solutions have often been located or situated in proposals for furthering and enhancing investment, financing, planning, governance and regulatory reform, sometimes substituting state with non-state actors, or top-down with bottom-up approaches. These tendencies, I argue, signify a general ‘incompleteness’ of intellectual loops and circuits. It thus becomes important to acknowledge the very incompleteness of theory production and knowledge making itself, and to counter teleological pursuits in academia.

This incompleteness, I contend, has been echoed within much broader engagements. For instance, it is a central focus in Žižek’s involvement with quantum physics with regard to a sense of the ‘ontological incompleteness’ of our understanding of reality itself.³ It is inherent in Godel’s famous incompleteness theorems of

³ Žižek 2012.

mathematical logic, which demonstrate the impossibility of proving everything.⁴ It is synonymous with Nyamnjoh's representations of an acquiescence of ways of knowing, being and becoming, where incompleteness is considered a necessary and celebrated condition that is present and evident in everything that exists.⁵ It is echoed in Sassen's portrayals of cities' unique and complex ability to renew and to reinvent themselves amid unconstrained realities, practices, and processes across time and space.⁶ Moreover, it is evident in my own observations and experiences of the extent to which infrastructures in African cities are subject to incremental and continual redefinition, always in the making, always becoming, never appearing or intending to arrive at a complete form.⁷

All the above claims and assertions encourage us to transcend teleological pursuits in academia and to appreciate the need to be more open to different realities, rather than to predefined end goals. Only then do we stop portraying local occurrences as deficient, defective, fragmented or lacking, primitive, plain and less developed; and begin to understand several articulations through a much deeper sense that transcends normative, essentialist or judgmental overtones. Simply put, just because something does not appear a certain way does not mean that it is susceptible to failure, brokenness, breakdown, fragmentation, disconnectedness or incoherence. Just as knowledge itself is incomplete, we need to begin to appreciate the incomplete existence of material conditions and articulations; and such existence as a normal order and inherent condition of being.

Transcending Teleological Pursuits

The incompleteness of intellectual loops and circuits is increasingly manifested through contrasts between the global south and the global north. For example, while incompleteness is part and parcel of contexts everywhere, the global south (aware that the notion of 'the global south' raises definitional complications not only in terms of geography, but also with regards to the fact that what is often referred by the prefix of 'southern' is often strikingly influenced by other geographies) has increasingly been portrayed as a pathology of incompleteness. Accordingly, a utopian-dystopian and transformative-incrementalist kind of binary is often presented in which developments in the 'developed' world are seen as

⁴ See Smullyan 1992.

⁵ Nyamnjoh 2017.

⁶ Sassen 2014.

⁷ Guma 2020; Guma 2022.

ontologically fixed, silent, stable, smooth-functioning, non-contestable and unconsciously backgrounded while those in the developing world are viewed as diverse, heterogeneous, divergent and malleable. This diversity, heterogeneity, divergence and malleability is often viewed as being synonymous with the global south; a view that fits within histories in which the global south is mostly imagined in terms of “lack,” “absence,” and “an incompleteness that translates into ‘inadequacy,’”⁸ in justification of “the teleological claim that the South needs to follow the North’s trajectory if it is to develop.”⁹

Therefore, it becomes imperative to engage the global south in a way that is more productive; and this means reading southern conditions as they really are: and that is in the ways in which they are differentiated, heterogeneous and diverse. Especially those that tend to diverge from conventional and codified notions. Here, the global south, given its largely postcolonial histories, is imagined as largely incomplete where its incompleteness highlights dysfunctions and divergences. The global south is viewed as a region/geography that still lacks and is rendered unfinished, precarious and largely informal, whose modernist impetus bows to logics of incompleteness. Thus here, its ordinary, mundane and ephemeral occurrences are so often equated or associated with ‘failure’ because they ‘diverge from norms.’

Such offhand and reductive treatises and perspectives are not only ‘tailored’ to suit elusory one-size-fit-all frameworks and premises, they perpetually underplay context-based articulations, embeddedness, and multiple overlaps and coexistences in place. Moreover, the global south and global north are not in fact hermetic (nor delineated as polar opposites), but are rather fundamentally entangled by multiplicities of variegated dimensional fluxes. Therefore, it becomes important to transcend essentialist and normative outlooks. Not that the alternative, however, should be a totalistic recourse to de-territorialising, deprovincialising, and decentring of knowledge by relying instead on the varieties of minor knowledges – referred to by Mbembe and Nutall as “compartmentalisation of knowledge”¹⁰ and by Aina as “fragmentation of disciplines,” as these too can be highly “splintered and fragmented, disjointed and often abstracted”¹¹ as conceptions and empiricisms of situated realities. In this provocation, therefore, I suggest general grounds in a carefully restrained form of relativism and pluralism, and approaches that transcend “‘the interpretive monopoly’ of completist,

⁸ Chakrabarty 2000, 32.

⁹ Sheppard 2014, 141.

¹⁰ Mbembe and Nutall 2004, 350.

¹¹ Aina 2004, 96.

reductive and negative descriptions of ‘others,’”¹² and excessive dependency on major (or minor) knowledge systems and theoretical streams that often fail “to come to terms with the infinite complexity of the real world.”¹³

This calls for a less teleological and judgmental approach to situated worlds and contexts, especially those that lie outside hegemonic norms and ideals. It calls for transcending reductionist endeavours, particularly those that take inherently unidimensional perspectives based on the totalised account that real-world *in-situ* experiences and singular assemblages that do not yield to singularity, dominancy and universality (often of the West) are deficient, fragmented and inadequate. Furthermore, it calls for transcending the tendency to use contexts and articulations in the global south as significations of the obverse of what such contexts and articulations are and what they are not, or what they should or should not be.

Ultimately, this means taking these elements as elements that espouse potentiality and possibility as opposed to pervasive and tenacious ineptitude. In practice, it means viewing different contexts and articulations not as self-contained units of analysis, but as points of engagement. It means thinking through contexts and articulations in creative and critical ways that draw attention to ordinariness,¹⁴ heterogeneity,¹⁵ different assemblages¹⁶ and forms of organising.¹⁷ What becomes imperative here is the importance of going beyond ideal types toward viewing dwellings and domains in the global south as social, cultural, political, historical contexts that are produced through their particular relationships with (the often exclusionary nature of) neoliberal and market-oriented interventions as well as globalization, development and postcoloniality. Dwellings and structures are not homogeneous, structurally and demographically defined entities, but rather are diverse, heterogeneous and different, and by so being ought not to be disparaged for their diversity, heterogeneity and difference as unsophisticated and less-developed.

¹² Mudimbe-Boyi 2002, 31.

¹³ Walsham 1993, 478.

¹⁴ See Robinson 2013.

¹⁵ See Boeck 2011.

¹⁶ See Simone 2010.

¹⁷ See Watson 2009.

Calibrating Collaborative Infrastructures

Knowledge infrastructures are “robust networks of people, artefacts, and institutions that generate, share, and maintain specific knowledge about the human and natural worlds.”¹⁸ Knowledge infrastructures which cover concepts, implementations and applications ought to be viewed beyond teleologically motivated pursuits. This section advances, among other things, the need to calibrate collaborative infrastructures of knowledge production in the generation, sharing, and maintenance of scientific knowledge. Aware of the problematic geopolitical asymmetries in academic knowledge-productions in the context of complex and imbalanced relations of – and circulations between – global north and global south, this calls for building, facilitating and sustaining efforts – such as dialogues, engagements and endeavours – especially of a type that highlights the need for south-south (in addition to north-south) connections and mutual trust for re-thinking theory, academic practices, and research methods and ethics.

A collaborative approach becomes particularly imperative for collectively envisioning global scholarship and the global south in it. It becomes imperative for thinking across different cases and examples rather than comparatively; and developing unexpected comparisons that attempt to shift the flows of ideas. Moreover, collaborative engagements are imperative for operationalising theoretical pluralism. This may well entail stepping out of the precincts of dominant disciplines to engage with other disciplines as well and seeking out surprises and unfamiliarities. So, rather than reproaching unfamiliar or strange domains and development processes, we need to view them as what they really are; to see the value in their abilities to transform different contexts and domains. Such processes are imperative for giving credence to alternate intellectual formulations, which for the most part have been de-valued within the hegemonic sphere of theory production on account of not being ‘scientific enough’ – on some occasions considered as ‘second class’ and described as ‘metaphysical,’ ‘spiritual,’ or, at best as alternative ‘belief systems’ – none of which meet the ultimate gold standards of ‘rationality’ and the ‘scientific spirit.’

These efforts are particularly important because of their comprehensive potential to: (1) build new theories and engage with neglected positions of African/Southern theory and visions for a decolonial research praxis; (2) produce empirically original evidence, perhaps through even more innovative methodologies; and (3) bring together a broad range of scholars and institutions from (or with interest in) the South and build capacity among research institutions

¹⁸ Edwards 2010, 188.

and early career researchers across the global south. In such efforts, possible pathways for consideration involve:

1. *Recognising the inherent incompleteness of knowledge itself; appreciating the plurality of knowledge; and understanding that knowledge can and does co-exist.* Not only is knowledge plural, it is entangled and should indeed “speak with, to, about and against one another at times.”¹⁹ This requires challenging “hegemonic legacies, discourses, practices and experiences of academic knowledge productions.”²⁰ It includes opening up to other forms of articulation and modes of practice or being-in-the-world. Thus, we need to reconstruct and rewrite how we (re-)produce and share knowledge. In this, we need to recognise the importance of working within and across fields and to generate a body of interdisciplinary knowledge, and one that is “transformative, and produces crucial insight beyond specific containers and border regimes.”²¹
2. *Employing postcolonial modes of theorisation undertaken through paying analytical attention to ‘ordinary contexts’ of the global south beyond the paradigmatic contexts of the global north.* Postcolonial approaches inspire us to think of contexts beyond those that clearly fall within the dominant circuits of knowledge. The need to focus on development that often tends to fall outside of the central frameworks and language, and beyond often-more-familiar contexts. This is important for further opening up space for alternative conceptions (from the south) that illuminate how different geographies and contexts produce novel forms and articulations that exceed what might tend to be – at the time – the most dominant and hegemonic forms. Moreover, it is imperative for instigating conversations that speak to different forms of power ranging from formal/hegemonic to informal/heterogeneous structures. This also means moving away from the heightened role of hegemonic institutions, turning attention to ordinary dwellings, knowledges, and needs as well. By so doing, grounding our discourses in southern perspectives that not only transcend dominant interpretations but also de-territorialise, de-provincialise, and decentre knowledge and propose a new conception and new awareness in our theoretical outlook. At the micro-level, this means writing situated dwellings from the view point of the people who live there – thereby without necessarily intending to reinforce the existing structures.
3. *Questioning the idea and expectation that southern contexts should evolve in*

¹⁹ University of Zurich and Humboldt-University of Berlin 2021.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

a linear trajectory from incompleteness to more complete arrangements. And because of this expectation, such contexts are often examined as contexts that will eventually evolve into more complete arrangements, and therefore through the lens of globally sanctioned trademarks of modernity. Those that diverge from the preferred ideal of modernity are subsequently disparaged. This calls for the need to align with the post-modern enterprise; to go beyond static and techno-centred descriptions/visions; and transcend the traditional, linear and unified notions that are implicit in Euro-American notions of how material conditions and ontological objects should be or operate. We need to shift narratives away from the strong dichotomy of north-south, utopian-dystopian visions and imaginaries, etc., toward a more realistic picture of diverse constellations. We must recognise the existence of a multiplicity of knowledge as well as language's capacity to name, classify, and assess real-world in-situ experiences and material conditions and assemblages without the need to subsume these within specific/reductionist categories.

4. *Realising that researching is not always only about documenting, but theorising – sometimes by intuition and sight.* It is important for us as scholars to think more conceptually and be more propositional in how we explicate real-world *in-situ* experiences and singular assemblages in the global south. In this, it is imperative to highlight the importance of pluriversal approaches from the margins, new vocabularies from the global south, and articulations that exceed the language of the normative.
5. *Recognising that researching cannot be just a matter of observation from a distance but a process of knowledge production that requires careful and continued grounding and contextualisation in a non-hegemonic, decentred and participatory way.* It requires immersions in the field and active engagement with those in it to fully understand prevailing formations that transpire through a multitude of mingled connections and tangled relations, and are synonymous with complex legacies and intricate lives. This means employing innovative non-representational methodologies that draw upon a wide array of sources and which go beyond written material in official accounts. A better explication of the molecular details of everyday life becomes important. Ethnographic methods that incorporate everyday unequal experiences have the potential to make studies in the global south more representational and equitable and to further valorise the orientations and practices of those who create, sustain and inhabit diverse, differentiated and heterogeneous worlds. It has the potential to open up space for alternative conceptions (from the south) that illuminate how different real-world *in-situ* experiences and singular assemblages produce novel forms and articulations that exceed what might tend to be – at the time – the most dominant and hegemonic

forms. Ethnography and doing fieldwork with close attention to mundane situations of quotidian life is important as fleeting observations and encounters are essential for giving more voice to the people (beyond regimes of silencing) and highlighting how material conditions and ontological objects are constantly being made.

6. *Opening up our 'inquiry' to other forms of articulation and to new dimensions.* For instance, scientific research to date has profusely focused on the spurring rise, development and remodelling of the most competitive articulations everywhere. Big developments and articulations are perceived to command enormous stature or impact and offer more visibility. It is important to examine the small and developing articulations as well, as these are a crucible for radical new socio-technical paradigms. This is necessary to counter the indifference to the 'smallness' of material conditions and ontological objects that still remain relatively understudied and peripheral in theorising. I believe that the small and marginal dwellings and domains within developing contexts have a prominent role to play within theorising. They have the potential to illuminate not just the peculiarity of experiences, but to also raise wider questions about the nature of modernity, governance and the interactions between global capital flows and the material conditions in context.
7. *Drawing from the different forms of expertise and knowledge of many, including resident populations.* This particularly includes employing narration that embeds the residents' experience, and presupposes splintered responses to standard and incremental developments. In other words, going beyond standardisation, and recognising that populations live beyond the network and employ, in their everyday lives, creative manoeuvres shaped by organic processes and practices within their different/specific neighbourhoods. Thereby acknowledging that the residents are constantly negotiating different ways of dealing with their encounters; acknowledging their ingenuity and the ways in which this ingenuity is in fact shaped by organic processes that materialise through self- and communally organised formations of governance. And most of all, recognising that the residents do in fact have their own sociotechnical dreams and visions which sometimes transcend standardised forms of networks. This is because much of what is currently playing out in the global south are not processes that manifest through contrasts, but rather processes that are highly embedded and located in modes of practice that are shaped through mostly resident-initiated processes. Thus, local articulations are not to be viewed as simply relational, but a relation of plurality.
8. *Decolonising – or at least diversifying – pedagogies against the backdrop of an already extant hegemonic sphere of knowledge production.* Within area/regional studies, there are emerging calls to rethink developments in the south

in a way that reflects their southern-ness and renaissance, transcending dominant Euro-American traditions and long-held assumptions as a means of departing toward a more nuanced discourse that brings locals into a critical, innovative and situated engagement. The question here could be how do we use ‘afro-modernity’²² in Africa, for instance, as a shorthand for a way of life that exceeds the modernity of the West, or practice in the global south, but not as a parody of geographical determinism. The question by extension becomes, how do notions like ‘afro-modernity’ or ‘southern practice’ serve to reframe the way we think about Africa/the global south; and what do they add to extant analytical constructs? Answering such questions requires a re-citing of contexts and articulations in a way that highlights regional/geographical nuances and ways of knowing informed by their locatedness and situatedness.

9. *Pursuing immediate and relative goals without necessarily sacrificing more radical and systemic challenges and solutions.* Rather than simply a teleological approach aimed at more grand pursuits, we ought to pursue both immediate (realist) and long-term (radical) goals without sacrificing either one. This further highlights the need for countering asymmetric relations in academia and calibrating collaborative networks and partnerships.
10. *Counteracting the asymmetrical relations in academia through more introspective engagement, self-critique, attention to others, and sensitivity towards the work of power.* The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted deep-rooted inequalities and injustices prevalent in academic institutions, including the implicit extractivism of labour and knowledge that sometimes tends to exist, as well as the asymmetrical ways in which such extraction tends to be instrumentalised through a gaze that lends itself to supremacy of western framings and worldviews. Here, pertinent questions emerge that demand further deliberation, including how to mitigate global challenges of inequality and injustice, and how to overcome systemic inequalities, differentiation and completist pursuits in the academy beyond easy victories. These questions are further explored in the following impulses.

²² The use of the notion of Afro-modernity is particularly important, as it debunks generalist and reductionist accounts and top-down definitions, and transcends offhand and reductive expositions tailored to elusory one-size-fit-all frameworks and premises of African worlds and knowledges.

Grace Akello

Impulse Two: The Nature of Inequality in Scientific Collaborations in Africa

To conduct any scientific study, one needs funds. Whereas I have met many scholars in relatively well-off countries who are able to finance their own studies, many scientists in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICS) need grants in order for them to assess any thematic issue that interests them. However, when we begin to premise every intervention on ‘scientific evidence’ generated by researchers, and that we need research as a basis for mitigating protracted challenges, then we will ignite other debates concerning relevancy, appropriateness and usefulness of ‘research’ as a basis for addressing protracted challenges in the global south.

Sources of scientific research grants are fund-awarding bodies, including the German Research Foundation (DFG), United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI), National Institutes of Research, Social Science Research Council (SSRC-UK) and International Development Research Centre (IDRC-Canada) to mention a few examples. One of the cross-cutting criteria for scientists to access funds since the early 2000s is that scientists in the north will collaborate with researchers in the global south. The idea resonates with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17, which calls for collaboration, partnerships and interdisciplinarity as a tool for mitigating global challenges.²³ There are very few grant-awarding institutions which specifically target individual or groups of African scientists who will work independently. Although scientists strive to work together, sometimes ensuring interdisciplinarity, in an attempt to find real solutions needed for development, it is soon discovered that interdisciplinarity is not truly a solution to mitigating common protracted challenges in the Global South. Instead many scientists indeed discover that partnerships and scientific collaborations are not value-free solutions or tools in an arena where scientists must live and work in unequal trajectories.

In the following example of recent scientific researches aimed at eradicating or wiping away malaria, a disease deeply linked to its broader social and economic origins, I will show that many scientists indeed co-created various knowledge(s), but they never contributed to the core idea of eradicating this disease. Instead, regardless of much financial investment by Bill and Melinda Gates, the involvement of reputable pharmaceutical companies scientists inadvertently steered away from the very objective, which was to eradicate malaria.

²³ UN “Sustainable Development Goal 17,” accessed September 6, 2022.

In fact, after a decade of conducting researches aimed at eradicating malaria through the use of the most effective pharmaceutical, Coartem, many more problems were created, including disregard of affordable and efficacious anti-malarials like chloroquine and Fansidar. Later, I will also argue that the skewed focus on deploying medical technologies for diseases with broader socio- and political origins makes some research aims quite insufficient. To put it in another way, malaria is not only a parasitic disease, but it is a disease with strong social, economic and political ramifications to the extent that the poor are more affected by this disease due to inability to practice preventive measures. And to recommend that technical or medical technologies are sufficient in malaria eradication is to suggest an apolitical, value-free solution. I will also highlight some of the unintended consequences of scientist innovations, which, contrary to what was originally planned, make living conditions for vulnerable people worse instead of improving them. In part, it is because the grants awarded to generate scientific evidence suggest a preference for particular methodologies (e.g., randomised controlled trials and the creation of technical solutions like pharmaceuticals) for many protracted challenges in the global south. Ultimately, scientific ‘thinking’ requires an active diverting of attention from and disregard for broader social, political and economic inequalities. This is particularly difficult for many scientists in the global south because we sometimes participate and even endorse technical solutions for challenges we actually understand better and ‘know how’ to mitigate. For example, regarding the vast research to eradicate malaria in the early to late 2000s, many scientists focused on malaria-paracetemia-clearing pharmaceuticals and other technologies. Successful grant applications were those which helped to channel resources and scientific activities according to the donor and pharmaceutical companies’ demands. The pharmaceutical Coartem’s efficacy preoccupied scientists to a great extent. Scientists from the north-south collaborations frequently marvelled at the extent to and speed with which the modern efficacious pharmaceutical cleared malaria parasites for non-complicated malaria. This was regardless of the fact that there were cheap and affordable medicines available that were effective in non-complicated malaria treatment. The only challenge facing many tropical countries was the emergence of drug-resistant malaria parasites for malaria. I will come back to this issue later, to suggest that a significant proportion of protracted challenges in Africa do not need scientific research to be resolved.

The Nature of Scientific Collaborations

From the moment a call for applications is sent, hidden structures and frameworks can be discerned, and their purpose will be to create and perpetuate inequality between the scientists based in the north and those based in the south. Colonial histories framed within cognitive, methodological and ontological inequalities are simultaneously embedded in this seemingly neutral phenomenon aimed at supporting scientists in conducting studies of their choice. For many grant-awarding bodies, inbuilt structures define what the scientific problem will be, who will do what, the questions to be answered and the techniques needed for answering the questions. Inbuilt within the call too, is the basic idea that the researchers in the north²⁴ will lead this project. They will steer it. They will manage the fund, and will be assisted by scientists in the south. The scientists in the south may not even see the value to the topic, but will seek to find an opportunity to participate and work towards a desired research goal. I will come to some of these issues in the discussion, but first I would like to show how I know what I discuss in this paper.

Methodology: Ways of Knowing What We Know

There are various ways of knowing what we know. Although I espouse ethnographic methodologies as an anthropologist, in this paper I will evoke embodied knowledge and experiences which I gathered in various capacities in Uganda. I have experience as an academic collaborating in partnerships with northern academics, I am a technical reviewer for grant applications for many awarding bodies, and I am a researcher, whereby I have participated as a principal investigator, a co-investigator and a consulting researcher. Since my return to Uganda after being awarded a doctoral degree in the Netherlands I started to see how global inequality permeates, exists and is even perpetuated in, all scientific arenas in the global south. I was first deployed in a state university as a senior lecturer, where my monthly income was lower than that of a doctoral African

²⁴ Some scientists have examined the arbitrariness of these classifications and what will count as northern-based scientists and those based in the Global North: See Ciocca and Delgado 2020. “The reality of scientific research in Latin America; an insider’s perspective,” accessed September 15, 2022. It is argued that geographical locations are only one of the concerns for this dichotomy but the cross-cutting objective is to perpetuate inequality among high-income and low-income countries (e.g. in Latin America).

student in the Netherlands. When I applied for a consulting position at a reputable malaria vaccine trial study, I was contracted as a senior social scientist, not knowing that my northern supervisor will have a lesser qualification and work experience. Through working with north-south collaborations and observing how they exist and manifest and, through making inquiries about how things are done or why they are done, it was possible to sometimes engage in quite difficult conversations. For example, it was common for a junior scientist based in the north to supervise, instruct and assess performance by even senior scientists in the south. Why is this so? Is the preceding example not the epitome of epistemological and cognitive empire still hovering over Africa?

In a protocol reviewer's meeting in the recent past, I was amazed at how many scientists have even mastered the art of *not knowing*,²⁵ particularly if difficult engagements are ignited concerning epistemologies and how methodologies espoused in scientific collaborations need to be changed. For instance, do we still need to award grants to north-south collaborations to ascertain why many African populations lack clean water? Do we still need to send out a call for protocols whereby we review scientists' attempts to find out why gold, diamond and oil-rich countries have protracted wars? In whose interests is the knowledge generated and in whose benefit? And why are many south-based scholars frequently expressing interest in such partnerships in knowledge production processes?

How Is Inequality in Scientific Collaborations and Partnerships Perpetuated?

Tokenism in participation is one of the ways through which inequality in north-south collaborations is created and perpetuated. After the call for applications, many unknowing African scientists may attempt the unthinkable. They may clearly articulate the protracted challenges and in their view show how they will apply appropriate scientific methods to prove their point. They may then invite northern-based scientists to join the team. Even though they can be successful up to this stage, hidden rules exist and are inbuilt in the grant application systems. For instance, even if it is not clearly stated that the grant must be managed by the university-in-the-north, it is better for such south-based researchers to follow this code of conduct.

Further, during budget allocations, it is prudent that the biggest portion will be allocated to partners in the north. In some applications, there is a need to

²⁵ Akello and Beisel 2019.

adhere with wages in full-time equivalent [FTE], i.e., applicants' current salary, and this is always consistent with the global-south scientists' income. Scientists from high-income countries will definitely earn a higher pay for the same amount of time and work done in these scientific collaborations. In the recent past, it is also possible to see that one can justify a relatively higher payment for a south-based scientist only if they were trained in north-based universities! Therefore, while many scholars examining ways to deal with imbalances within north-south collaborations and are quick to propose south-south collaborations, we already see that the cognitive empire has not only permeated north-south collaborations, but it is already entrenched in the proposed south-to-south partnerships aimed at producing knowledge much needed for addressing protracted challenges particularly in Africa.

Close scrutiny of the processes and manifestations of north-south scientific collaboration will only confirm that scientists in the south need to brace not only for cognitive and symbolic forms of power wielded over them by their northern counterparts, they will also need to call these forms of partnerships by name. Colonisation of African minds is its main objective. And African scientists will inadvertently propagate its ideology. For instance, to a great extent we cannot explain fully why senior and highly skilled scientists in Africa will adhere with taking two to four years to engage in research which aims to prove that one new pharmaceutical is efficacious in treating non-complicated malaria, while knowing that the main protracted problem facing local malarious regions where the scientists live is *how* to treat complicated malaria and in fact the need to prevent infections. Is it not true then that we need to divert the gaze more on what is happening among scientists in the south, and how they themselves participate in perpetuating these inequitable collaborations?

Concluding Remarks

While assessing the theme of decolonising scientific collaboration and partnerships in research, and the need to produce scientific evidence to mitigate protracted challenges in the Global South, my embodied knowledge rejects an engagement with these three ideas: First, that we need scientific research to mitigate global challenges, particularly those experienced in the south. Second, that the core problems will always be clearly hatched and bred in the north and that the outcome will be relevant for the global south. And third, if scientists in the north-south collaboration already recognise that they are participants and perpetrators of inequality.

Therefore, we need to ask different questions. For example: if many common challenges experienced in the global south do not need a technical investigation process to discover them, is it prudent for scientists to instead directly list, name and prioritise these problems? After the preceding activity, will it not be useful to devise local ways (just like our northern collaborators) to mitigate them?!

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Impulse Three: Global Coloniality of Power and Collaborative Knowledge Production

There is no genuine intellectual and academic collaboration without mutual recognition as human beings and scholars across what William E. B. DuBois termed the “colour line,” and, by extension, the gender line as well as invented geographical lines.²⁶ The essential prerequisite for this mutual recognition is identified by Francis B. Nyamnjoh in terms of a shift from the Euromodernist “delusions of grandeur that come with ambitions and claims of perfection” to “incompleteness as social reality.”²⁷ Nyamnjoh elaborated that “Africa is incomplete without the rest of the world, and the rest of the world is incomplete without Africa, and both are incomplete without the natural and supernatural worlds.”²⁸

The same is true for other parts of the world, including the powerful global north, which has to unlearn colonialism and imperialism so as to know how to live and share the planet with others and relearn how to learn from others and with others. Nyamnjoh underscored that “ontologies of incompleteness” enable a “social reality and form of knowing generative and dependent on interconnections, relatedness, open-mindedness and multiplicities,” and “harbours emancipatory potentials and inspires unbounded creativity and hopefully a reclamation of more inclusionary understanding of being human and being in general.”²⁹

However, without exorcism of the ghost of the Cartesian subject, which haunts the modern world and prevents any possibility of a return to the social reality of ‘incompleteness,’ the realisation of genuine and sustainable collaborations and partnership remains a challenge. One of the key issues which make the Cartesian subject a big problem is what Žižek termed “Cartesian monological

²⁶ DuBois 1903, 3.

²⁷ Nyamnjoh 2017, 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

subjectivity” which prevents “discursive intersubjectivity.”³⁰ Without intersubjectivity, there is no possibility of collaboration and partnership. We must also remember how subjectivity and epistemology were conjoined in Rene Descartes’ widely cited dictum “cogito ergo sum/I think, therefore I am,” and how this rendition enabled the rise of egopolitics of knowledge as a driver of imperial science.³¹

The problem of egopolitics of knowledge is the fiction of the unsituated knower who is a substitute of God and is able to produce knowledge from “a universalistic, neutral, objective point of view.”³² This is made possible by two Cartesian logics of “ontological dualism” where the body and the mind severed from each other and the second is methodological “solipsism” which privileges “an internal monologue of the subject” with itself so as to reach “certitudes in knowledge.”³³ Such positionality in knowledge production, with its “God-eye view knowledge” and indeed God-complex, is never amenable to partnerships and collaborations.³⁴ These somehow philosophical interventions might sound too abstract, but they have very practical implications for our discussions and engagements on collaborations and partnerships, which entail considering the following:

- The invention and hierarchisation of knowledge itself in terms of superior/valid/legitimate/scientific knowledge on the one hand and on the other inferior/invalid/illegitimate/superstitious knowledge;
- The construction of a superior people with history and knowledge and of inferior people without history and knowledge;
- The imperial making of an uneven intellectual division of labour;³⁵
- Orientalism as a constitutive of an imperial episteme underpinned by a paradigm of difference (Self-Other);³⁶
- Writing colonialism out of the history of knowledge production and social theory, forgetting that “Europe is literally the creation of the Third World;”³⁷
- Metrocentrism, i.e. the “transposition of narratives, concepts, categories, or theories derived from the standpoint of one location onto the rest of the world, under the assumption that those narratives, concepts, and categories are universal.”³⁸

30 Žižek 1999, 1.

31 Grosfoguel 2007.

32 *Ibid.*, 213.

33 Grosfoguel 2013, 75–76.

34 Grosfoguel 2007, 214.

35 *Ibid.*

36 Said 1978.

37 Fanon 1968, 54.

38 Go 2016, 94.

Taken together, all these consequences of Cartesianism, imperialism and colonialism distort the normal cognitive processes of knowing and knowledge production premised on social relations with other human beings and in dialogue with others. The idea of knowing as a social relation and dialogical process is what prompted Nyamnjoh to coin the concept of “convivial scholarship” that “recognises the deep power of collective imagination and the importance of inter-connections and nuanced complexities.”³⁹ He elaborated:

It is a scholarship that questions assumptions of a priori locations and bounded ideas of power and all other forms of relationships that shape and are shaped by the socio-cultural, political and economic circumstances of social actors. It is a scholarship that sees the local in the global and the global in the local by bringing them into informed conversations, conscious of the hierarchies and power relations at play at both the micro and macro levels of being and becoming.⁴⁰

Convivial scholarship must not be confused with “unanimity” scholarship. Nyamnjoh explains that it is critical scholarship that is “rigorous and committed” to “truth in its complexity and nuance” but with the intention to enhance “a common humanity that is in communion with the natural and supernatural environments that make a balanced existence possible.”⁴¹ However, conceptually and theoretically, the cognitive empire which has invaded the mental universe of the modern world and the Cartesian subject (the subject with a capital “S”) with its ego-centrism have to fall for this “convivial scholarship” to strive for the emergence of genuine collaborations and partnerships.⁴²

This is why resurgent and insurgent decolonisation of the 21st century is a necessary and urgent struggle against the cognitive empire and the Cartesian conceptions of subjectivity that privilege sovereign subjecthood (Imperial Being) and, convinced of and proud of its claimed completeness, make it impervious to partnerships and collaborations. This analysis takes us to the next challenge, which is that of how the cognitive empire continues to enable the coloniality of knowledge, which in turn complicates the possibilities of genuine and sustainable collaborations and partnerships.

³⁹ Nyamnjoh 2017, 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴² Laclau 1996; Žižek 1999; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a.

The Hindrances of the Cognitive Empire and Coloniality of Knowledge

The elephant at the centre of initiatives towards collaborations and partnership in knowledge production between scholars from the Global South and scholars from the Global North is what Boaventura de Sousa Santos termed the “cognitive empire” – while Santos invoked “the end of the cognitive empire”⁴³ as the title of his book, it would be premature to celebrate. The cognitive empire is a non-physical empire which has invaded the mental universe of the modern world so as to set in motion what James Blaut termed the “colonizer’s model of the world.”⁴⁴ The coloniser’s model of the world was originally predicated on the notion of the emptiness of the world outside of Europe and survives today on the notion of inferior people who are yet to attain full humanity under the “civilising” tutelage of Europe.⁴⁵ With reference to women’s struggles for liberation and collaboration, Françoise Verges provided an extended critique of what she termed “civilisational feminism” and defined it this way:

This feminism borrows the vocabulary and objectives of the colonial civilizing mission, modernizing the policy that Frantz Fanon summarised thus: ‘Let’s win over the women and the rest will follow,’ by putting first and foremost ‘women’s rights’ at the centre of global politics, hence offering arguments to neoliberalism and imperialism difficult to refute (who is for forced marriages, girls being sold, women being denied rights?). By suggesting that the defense of women’s rights should justify armed interventions, restricted visa policies, and close surveillance of non-white families and of queer sexualities and genders, instead of promoting a neutralised and pacified ‘equality,’ civilizational feminism was finally able to occupy a full seat at the table of power, a place that it had been denied under colonialism and for which it had to show a willingness to carry the torch of imperialism.⁴⁶

This is a good warning about what to watch out for in our push for collaborations and partnership as well as solidarities because they can continue to carry the poison of racism and coloniality of knowledge and being. The scary thing is that the cognitive empire survived the dismantlement of the physical empire and continues to wreak havoc on the people’s minds, inclusive of those who are genuinely trying to push forward the agenda of collaborations and partnerships.

As stated by Blaut, the logic behind the coloniser’s model of the world is that “Europe, eternally, is Inside. Non-Europe is Outside. Europe is the source of most

⁴³ Santos 2018.

⁴⁴ Blaut 1993, 5.

⁴⁵ Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013b.

⁴⁶ Verges 2021, vii.

diffusions; non-Europe is the recipient.”⁴⁷ These notions could not have emerged without a particular conception of knowledge and knowing, creating and framing particular realities/ontologies. What emerged as “Europe” is in itself an epistemic creation, hence Hamid Dabashi defined it this way: “A continent, a global culture, a massive civilization, a state of being, a planetary imperial design, a nasty colonial concoction,” concluding by saying:

Because of Europe we have lost the worlds we knew as our own. Because of Europe we yearn to retrieve the worlds of our own. And because of Europe we oscillate between the world Europe has enabled and the world we wish to enable after – Europe.⁴⁸

This reality cannot be ignored in any of our meetings and initiatives aimed at creating genuine and sustainable collaborations and partnerships, which always depend on common departure points. One of the realities that must be considered ideationally and epistemically is well captured by Dabashi:

Europe has always been looking over our shoulders when we write. [...]. For centuries Europe has been staring at us – in its dehumanizing anthropology of our strangeness to it. It is long overdue we started staring back at and staring down Europe – both in and of itself, and in its transmutations in the rest of the world.⁴⁹

Taken together, Dabashi’s interventions call us to be prepared to engage in difficult conversations for genuine and sustainable collaborations and partnerships to be built. These difficult engagements have to enable partners and collaborators to “think the world beyond Europe, after Europe, not against Europe, but despite Europe.”⁵⁰

This takes us to another elephant in the house, which is the global economy of knowledge.

⁴⁷ Blaut 1993, 1.

⁴⁸ Dabashi 2019, 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

The Global Economy of Knowledge as a Hindrance to Partnerships and Collaborations

Fran Collyer, Raewyn Connell, Joao Mia and Robert Morrell’s book, titled *Knowledge and Global Power: Making New Sciences in the South*,⁵¹ provides a good overview of the current global economy of knowledge and the key debates. They mobilise and deploy the history of colonialism to introduce how the global political economy of knowledge was born. They posit that imperialism and colonialism did not only enable Europe to acquire “material wealth” but also “a rich dividend of knowledge,”⁵² elaborating further:

The colonized world was a fabulous mine of information, and the colonisers began sending back information and specimens as early as they sent spices, silver and gold. Brilliant feathers, exotic ornaments, strange plants, animal skins, maps, fragments of languages, and of course samples of native people, were put on ships to brighten the royal courts in Europe.⁵³

This was part of the unfolding of “imperial science” with the colonised world being “primarily a source of data,” and

[t]he information that flowed from the colonial world was assembled in the museums, libraries, scientific societies, universities, botanical gardens, research institutes, and government agencies of what we now call global North. The process produced an important structural division of labour.⁵⁴

Europe became rich data-wise because of imperial and colonial looting as well as what Jack Goody termed the “theft of history”⁵⁵ of the rest of the world so as to put Europe at the beginning and the centre of human history. It is therefore not surprising that for Europe, combining the data from the rest of the world with its own data, “the metropole became the main site of the theoretical moment in knowledge production,” and the “work of theorists in the metropole included the creation of formal generalisations such as the laws of physical science, and the mathematical formulas that represented them.”⁵⁶ Since the moment of colonial

51 Collyer et al. 2019.

52 Ibid., 8.

53 Ibid., 8.

54 Ibid., 9.

55 Goody 2006, 6.

56 Collyer et al. 2019, 9.

encounter, the global south continued to be the hunting and gathering site of raw data for well-funded researchers from the global north.

What the philosopher Paulin Hountondji⁵⁷ articulated as the thirteen indices of academic dependence of Africa on the global north has a long colonial and postcolonial history. What became colonised is the very knowledge of knowledge itself, with European ways of knowing pretending to be the only way and indeed the highway and other knowledges and ways of knowing delegitimated and pushed to the margins of society.⁵⁸ Universities in Africa including those that are a gift of African nationalism could not easily free themselves from the cognitive empire including from the “linguistic encirclement” by colonial languages.⁵⁹

While scholars like Jonathan Jansen correctly warn about talking carelessly about “Western knowledge” as if it was “unitary, when in fact, the West itself has experienced considerable epistemological turmoil over more than a century that belies the descriptions of European science as positivist, universal and exclusionary, this is simply false;”⁶⁰ this cannot be used as a form of denial of the existence of the cognitive empire and the continuation of coloniality of knowledge. Of course, changes have taken place within the global economy of knowledge that tend to conceal inequalities which persist. The north-south binaries are not yet rendered obsolete at all. Yes, new concepts of knowledge society, network society and technological society have emerged which try to re-characterise the global economy of knowledge as constituted by “complex and multi-directional flows and a system without a centre.”⁶¹ Yes, there might have been some shifts in the power dynamics due to a number of factors, two of which are resistance from the Global South and the other is increased global human entanglements, which have definitely complicated the previous metropole-periphery and North-South divisions. However, material inequalities, uneven intellectual division of labour, and coloniality of power continues to this day.

The example of the politics of publication illustrates it very well. Those presses and journals considered to be of high impact and international recognition are a monopoly of Europe and North America. The scholars located in the Global South continue to be put under pressure to publish in these major presses (university and commercial) and journals in order to gain recognition and promotion. The ‘international’ remains Europe and North America. In such a situation,

⁵⁷ Hountondji 1990.

⁵⁸ Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020.

⁵⁹ See Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986.

⁶⁰ Jansen 2019a, 10.

⁶¹ Collyer et al. 2019, 11.

how can genuine and sustainable collaborations and partnerships take place? Genuine and sustainable partnership and collaborations should never be premised on colonial and racist notions of charity and European guilt.

This analysis takes us to the urgent necessity of decolonisation as an unfinished process and as an essential pre-requisite for building genuine and sustainable collaborations and partnerships.

The Insurgent and Resurgent Decolonisation

The Portuguese sociologist and leading advocate of epistemologies of the South, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, posited that:

The truth of the matter is that, after five centuries of ‘teaching’ the world, the global North seems to have lost the capacity to learn from the experiences of the world. In other words, it looks as if colonialism has disabled the global North from learning in noncolonial terms, that is, in terms that allow for the existence of histories other than the universal history of the West.⁶²

This is a very profound intervention which is directly relevant to any of the discussions and initiatives aimed at establishing genuine and sustainable collaborations and partnerships. The invented ‘teacher–pupil’ relationship that emerged from the colonial experience has never been amenable to equal engagements and possibilities of working together as partners and collaborators. This is why at the centre of the decolonisation of the 21st century otherwise known in Latin America as ‘decoloniality’ is the need for Europe to subject itself to the painstaking deimperialisation of itself, so as to be able to live harmoniously with other worlds. This is why scholars like Achille Mbembe insist that decolonisation remains a key moment of the modern world and it “inaugurated a time of branching off toward innumerable futures.”⁶³

However, it is important to immediately raise the point that the cognitive empire could not countenance those “innumerable futures,” particularly those which were subversive of the “colonizer’s model of the world;”⁶⁴ hence we are witnessing the resurgent and insurgent decolonisation of the 21st century whose storm-troopers are the students, the youth, women’s movements, indigenous people’s movements, working people’s movements, ecological movements, femi-

⁶² Santos 2014, 19.

⁶³ Mbembe 2021, 4.

⁶⁴ Blaut 1993, 6.

nist movements and those of progressive intellectuals.⁶⁵ Sylvia Tamale defined decolonisation as rejection of “the epistemic hierarchy which privileges Western knowledge at the expense of non-Western knowledge systems” and elaborated that there is, at the centre, the cultivation of “critical consciousness” and “claim[ing] our humanity.”⁶⁶ She posed soul-searching questions:

How do we divert the paternalistic, fetishized and poised gaze of the Western reader from our beloved continent? How do we develop critical consciousness to counter racist patriarchal hegemonic power? Who will connect the ideological dots of racism, colonialism, capitalism, sexism and heterosexism in ways that our children understand? Can we move beyond Eurocentric knowledge hegemonies? How do we navigate Eurocentric ‘modernity’ without losing our ‘Africanness’?⁶⁷

The challenge is how to make sure that within the collaborations and partnerships that are emerging between scholars from the Global South and Global North, these questions are not lost. Let us partner and collaborate for purposes of decolonising the world and rehumanising the dehumanised. Thus, from a decolonial epistemic perspective, genuine and sustainable collaborations and partnerships should be premised on what Shose Kessi, Zoe Marks and Elelwani Ramugondo defined as “four dimensions of decolonizing work: structural, epistemic, personal, and relational.”⁶⁸ Collaboration and partnership are a relational project. Kessi et al. warn us that “structures, epistemologies and actions alike are dependent on human relations; we sustain and replicate systems of power and exclusion.”⁶⁹ The relational is key to any genuine and sustainable partnership and collaboration.

Conclusion: Against Claiming Easy Victories

The African revolutionary leader Amilcar Cabral (1979) of Guinea-Bissau correctly warned us not to tell lies and claim easy victories in our struggles against imperialism and colonialism.⁷⁰ This is a significant warning because it enables us not to exaggerate the meaning of the few existing partnerships and collaborations to

⁶⁵ See Tamale 2020; Verges 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu 2022.

⁶⁶ Tamale 2020, 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁸ Kessi, Marks and Ramugondo 2020, 271.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁷⁰ See Manji and Fletcher Jr. 2013.

the extent that we easily and complacently dismiss the existence of a cognitive empire and global coloniality of knowledge as key part of structural hindrances. For example, Jansen provides three empirical examples of collaborations and directly quotes the late South African scientist Bongani Mayosi of the University of Cape Town, telling him that “[c]ollaborations outside Africa have been vital in moving the African agenda forward. So, through the networks that I established in Oxford, in North America and in Europe, I have had collaborations and indeed mentors who are pillars in my work.”⁷¹ This is of course a good personal achievement that cannot be generalised too much to the extent of claiming to be enough evidence for “turning the decolonization project on its head.”⁷² Collyer et al. also provide us with three cases of collaborative studies on HIV/AIDS, climate change, and gender studies that were formulated by “Southern Intellectuals” who were very conscious about their marginality in the world of social science.⁷³ What is positive about Collyer et al.’s intervention is that they don’t easily claim victories to the extent of dismissing inequalities in the global economy of knowledge, rather they reveal their take on it: “We do not regard the global inequalities in the knowledge economy as a fixed structure, but as a dynamic one: brought into existence in the history of empire and colonialism, always changing and capable of more change.”⁷⁴ They make clear conclusions about their collaborations and realities of being a participant in the global economy of knowledge:

Location does matter: location both geographic and socio-political. All knowledge workers must face challenges imposed by their institutional and national context. All knowledge workers are affected by location in the global economy of knowledge. For researchers across the global South – in the Southern tier and beyond – this means grappling with the Northern hegemony embedded in institutions. Some accept that hegemony completely, some resist it strongly, and many make complex compromises, but no-one can simply escape it.⁷⁵

What we learn from Collyer et al. is that the rise of new domains of research, such as those to do with HIV/AIDS, climate change, and gender issues, have given “more room for Southern researchers to use their expertise and location to swing the pendulum away from Northern dominance and towards more equal terms of engagement.”⁷⁶ But funding from the Global North sustains the dependence

⁷¹ As quoted in Jansen 2019b, 66.

⁷² Jansen 2019b, 65.

⁷³ Collyer et al. 2019.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, xx.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

status. Unlike Jansen, who wishes to minimize the necessity of the decolonisation project based on three examples,⁷⁷ the reality is that we must intensify the decolonisation struggle at the institutional, epistemic, personal and relational domains as suggested by Kessi et al.⁷⁸

Let me therefore give the last word to Kessi et al., because they are very clear on what has to happen in the domain of the relational as an essential prerequisite for forging genuine and sustainable collaborations and partnership. Let us listen to them:

At its most basic level, relational decolonizing recognises human agency and our interdependence. It requires people to attend on a daily basis to the active creation of equity, mutuality, and reciprocity that cuts against the grain of privilege and power. It requires white and European scholars to do extra work to catch up with African-led debates, indigenous knowledge processes, and public discourses for purposes of listening and dialogue, not commodification or co-optation. It requires both creating space for and ceding space to scholars from excluded and marginalised communities, whether they have been marginalised due to gendered, racialized, epistemic, religious, ethno-linguistic, or embodied hierarchies.⁷⁹

Here is a generously offered roadmap. What is left is for us to make sure we rise adequately to it. It underscores agency and interdependence and this links up very well with the concept of ‘incompleteness’ with which this forum impulse opened as an essential element in seeking one another across invented genders and races, classes and ethnicities. The way forward is to bring knowledges from diverse communities and geographies into a common space such as the academy so as to enrich human life on the one hand and on the other to leapfrog humanity from the current systemic, structural, relational, institutional and epistemic crisis.

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⁷⁷ Jansen 2019b, 66.

⁷⁸ Kessi, Marks and Ramugondo 2020.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 275.

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Elísio Macamo and Nahed Samour

Forum II: ‘Reversing the Gaze’?! – Revisiting a Key Concept

Moderated by Claudia Derichs and edited by Andrea Fleschenberg*

Part of our network collaboration as *co²libri: conceptual collaboration – living borderless research interaction* was a series of fishbowl or workshop talks to enact conceptual collaboration as a foundational dialogical principle. These conversations were held digitally, due to pandemic circumstances, as part of the working group ‘Thinkers and Theories from the South’ organized by Kai Kresse, Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology of Muslim Societies at Freie Universität Berlin and Vice-Director at Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient.

Through such talks, though not exclusively, we aim to (1) rethink theory/-ies (in terms of alternative conceptual frameworks and baselines) and to (2) develop and cultivate visions of globally more fair and effective research practices in the light of Southern perspectives, as well as to (3) explore the potentials of genuine conceptual collaboration across disciplines, locations and positionalities. Added to this is our shared conviction that wide-ranging global North-centred knowledge productions and their underlying paradigms, and we as actors in a complex and multi-layered matrix, have an obligation to reflect on contributions to present-day academic hegemonies.

This forum entry is a document of one of our many conversations which took place in May 2021 via video-conferencing with colleagues in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe. We audio-recorded the interdisciplinary and transregional conversation between Elísio Macamo, Professor of Sociology at the University of Basel and one out of four principal investigators on the research project ‘Reversing the Gaze – Towards Post-Comparative Area Studies,’ and Nahed Samour, postdoctoral research fellow at the Integrative Research Institute Law & Society at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, concerned with Third World approaches to international law.¹ Both scholars contend issues and implications of conceptual

* We would like to thank Sydney Noemi Stein for the careful transcription of the audio-recording. The conversation has been lightly copy-edited for readability.

¹ For details see <https://reversingthegaze.net/>, accessed May 11, 2022: The aim of this project, conceived as a ‘conceptual laboratory,’ is “to take a critical theoretical approach ... call[ed] ‘reversing the gaze’ – i.e. deploying concepts developed in the Global South to the North. It tests

‘gazing,’ not only for transregional and interdisciplinary knowledge productions. They also raise concerns of epistemological and disciplinary boundaries and flaws and argue, if this is the appropriate term, for a decentring or ‘provincializing’ of epistemological and disciplinary radars along with subsequent alternate research praxes.

The fishbowl talk, transcribed and lightly edited here for readability, was moderated by Claudia Derichs, Professor of Transregional Southeast Asian Studies at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Guiding questions for both discussants were the following: What are key aspects, sites and challenges of ‘reversing the gaze’ for knowledge productions and teaching practices (in the case of Elísio Macamo)? If one takes cues from this approach, how would one describe and discuss the notion of ‘oppositional gaze,’ coined by bell hooks, and Edward Said’s ‘adversarial critique’ that makes Orientalism both so possible and so sustainable,² or ‘adversarial resistance’³ (in the case of Nahed Samour)? What are the forms and sites of ‘gazing’ to focus on; what repertoire and practices are key for subsequent knowledge productions and teaching practices? What about context sensitivity and the challenges of conceptual translations, for example of ‘global South’ and ‘Arab’ (as suggested by Nahed Samour)? Where do the discussants see concrete potential for the transformation of knowledge productions; what asymmetries or barriers have to be navigated and negotiated; and how can this be done?

The conversation documented in the following is a shortened version of a two-hour interactive conversation with both discussants and working group members where we opted to transcribe the input part only for this edited volume. In the concluding section of this forum entry, we point towards further debate inputs, food for thought and potential paths forward.

Claudia Derichs: Thanks a lot, Kai, for briefly introducing this series ‘Thinkers and Theories from the South’ and of course our tiny co²libri project. A very, very warm welcome to everybody. Today we thought, let’s do it slightly differently. We have two wonderful persons with us who could maybe engage with each other with their reflections. We have called it a fishbowl talk. Of course, Elísio [Macamo] and Nahed [Samour], you are the big fish in that fishbowl, and we

the analytic purchase of three mid-level concepts – ‘re-tribalisation,’ ‘political society’ and ‘the cunning state’ – on political crisis phenomena in Europe against the background of a careful inquiry into the methodological scope of comparison.”

2 Orientalism is understood by Said as “an adversarial critique not only of the field’s perspective and political economy, but also of the sociocultural situation that makes its discourse both so possible and so sustainable.” Said 1989, 210.

3 Ibid., 219–20.

are the little fish swimming around, but coming into the game maybe in the discussion as well. Let me briefly introduce our two big fish. I begin with Professor Elísio Macamo, who is a professor of African studies at the University of Basel, where he is with the Social Science department but also the Center for African Studies. His disciplinary background is sociology. He really stresses the broader field of social science, I should say, in his research. He has focused on topics such as knowledge, risk and development. He also deals a lot with methodological and conceptual issues. I particularly like the book volume which he authored – *Translation Revisited: Contesting the Sense of African Social Realities*.⁴ Thanks for being with us, and the same thanks to Dr Nahed Samour, who is a postdoctoral scholar at the Integrative Research Institute Law & Society, which is called Law and Society Institute (LSI), at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. She is educated in Law and Islamic studies, and when I look at the stations where you had positions, it reaches across the globe: Birzeit, Ramallah, then London, of course now Berlin, but also Harvard and Damascus. So that's quite a list. You had a PhD scholarship from the Max Planck Institute for European legal history in Frankfurt/Main. Your research is very much at the intersection of law and history, for example in history and histories of Islamic international law and relations, so that fits maybe quite neatly to partner up in a dialogical way with Elísio Macamo. The format, as I mentioned, is a little bit different but we would like to invite Elísio Macamo and Nahed Samour in the first input round to give us ideas of what we have clustered under two titles, namely 'Reversing the Gaze' – which is really something that I'd say is the marker of Elísio Macamo's thinking as far as I know his works – and Nahed Samour coming in on the other side that is for the time being labelled 'The Oppositional Gaze.' You're writing that it is a term that comes from bell hooks, but you are looking at it rather critically and bringing in Edward Said to partner up with bell hooks. Without further ado, I would love Elísio to jump in for five minutes with us and share [his thoughts with] us about reversing the gaze.

Elísio Macamo: Thank you very much, Claudia, and also thanks to Andrea and Kai for the invitation. I'm so happy to see so many people I know and did not expect to see here this afternoon.

If I say I'm working on migration, for example, what am I working on exactly? Am I working on the movement of people across political boundaries? Or on constraints on the free movement of people? Or even on the political organization of societies today? This may sound like I'm asking about my perspective on the phenomenon of migration, but I want to try to persuade you to think differently

4 Ouédraogo, Diawara and Macamo 2018.

about this. It's not a matter of perspective. It's a matter of the system of conceptual relations within which a particular concept – in this case the concept of migration, describing a specific phenomenon, that is, the movement of people – requires a particular meaning such that it is no longer about the phenomenon itself but about something else. And this is, in broad terms, my understanding of our project on *Reversing the Gaze*. There are four of us working in different corners of the world, Africa and different parts of Asia.⁵ And we came together to address the challenge of doing science in an intellectual environment that is legitimately angry, irritated and increasingly less predisposed to listening. So, is science Western? And if yes, what is the whole point of pursuing it elsewhere?

The way we decided to pursue this was by testing a simple hypothesis. Suppose we can take concepts developed and used in studying the 'Other' and apply them successfully in Europe. In that case, we will have reasons to assume that we need to frame the debate on cross-cultural research and Area Studies differently. The problem is not that science is Western. The problem is that we do not have enough methodological debates when we argue nowadays. It is not that there is anything particularly new in what we are doing, at least from an epistemological perspective. 'Western' science has always been a site for these debates, and the intellectual energy released by such discussions has inspired most of those involved in it to believe they are reinventing the wheel when they challenge Western epistemologies and hegemony. Now, we address this methodological challenge by reflecting on the theory and practice of comparison. Because that is what we think we are doing – not only when we study across cultures, but also when we engage in science. Knowledge production is a profoundly comparative enterprise. So, how should we think about this? Should we focus our attention on the vocabulary of science, i.e. on the concept? Are they the problem that we are facing?

We make this assumption in the programme, but how we address it individually is slightly different. So, my way of approaching this problem is to start by reflecting on concepts' role in enabling us to grasp reality, or whatever it is we're concerned with, and speak meaningfully about things. Again, what does it mean to talk about migration? If, as expected, our work is not about itself but rather about something else which stands in for that, then it might be helpful to inquire into that and ask questions about the possibilities of comparison. To do this, I

⁵ Ralph Weber, Professor of Political Science at the European Global Institute, University of Basel; Benedikt Korf, Professor of Political Geography, University of Zurich; Deval Desai, Professor of International Economic Law, University of Edinburgh; and myself. We are the principal investigators and work with a large team of doctoral and post-doctoral researchers.

argue that we need an adequate understanding of the research object because it will enable us to understand what knowledge is. And I think a lot about debates around what knowledge is, so the object is the thing toward which we direct a cognitive act. What conditions must this thing toward which we direct our mental attention meet for it to deserve attention from us? I guess that the thing must meet several conditions, chief among which should be relevance. Migration, for instance, is suitable for many perspectives, including political, social and economic perspectives. But to say that something is suitable implies a knowledge of it before the thing itself or perhaps suggests that knowledge is constitutive of the item itself.

So, if I say that the condition that something must meet for me to pay cognitive attention to it is that it interests me, then I'm saying that it is not its properties making it into an object. Instead, what makes it into an object is everything that is constitutive of my interest in the thing. If that were the case, defining migration as simply movement across boundaries would be wrong. Maybe migration expresses my fears about the cultural integrity of my lifeworld. Now, this brings me to a tentative definition of the research object. The object, as in 'research object,' is, for me, a theory of knowledge. In other words, the research object is not a domain that's out there and that we study even though it is. A theory of knowledge allows us to learn what we can know and how we can know it. So, I think the theory of knowledge must also include what you, Claudia, described as connectedness, that is, those values and principles that enable people across space to focus their attention on rendering intelligible to themselves and others. Now, the implication for comparison arises from this understanding of the object. We don't compare concepts, we compare objects. That is, we compare ways of looking or gazing because concepts acquire particular meanings within these ways of gazing.

Such a theory of knowledge entails the rules by which you render something visible. It also entails the facts you can draw to generate new statements about something and make them plausible. And it also entails the general principles based on which you infer logical links between your opinions and the facts that you use. Now, in my particular project in the programme, I apply the notion of retribalization used in colonial Africa to address the fears unleashed by Africans refusing to become cosmopolitan by renewing their primordial ties to the practice and sense of citizenship in Switzerland. So, I don't look at how the Swiss are retribalizing, but rather the overall conceptual scheme in which the way the Swiss manipulate the distance between themselves as individuals and some collective notion yields particular meanings to the notion of being Swiss.

I also have two colleagues, Benedikt Korf and Deval Desai, who adopt the same procedure to carry out research as well. Benedikt uses Dipesh Chakrabarty's notion of 'political society' (as opposed to 'civil society') to address political

movements like the AfD [Alternative for Germany] and Pegida in Germany and other movements in Austria. Deval deploys the notion of the ‘cunning state’ developed by Shalini [Randeria] to account for the way in which governments in developing countries use their fragility to evade accountability, and he does that to study Italy’s relationship with the European Commission. Now, our goal is not to produce better scholarships than what colleagues in these countries have been doing. It is not even to show that these countries are just like developing African or Asian countries. Our goal is to spell out the specific conditions under which concepts become useful as heuristic devices and to use these insights to develop a slightly different framework for the discussion of such issues as postcolonialism, decoloniality, etc. My personal take on this is that because they don’t frame these issues as methodological challenges, they run the risk of removing the ground from under the feet on which the critics stand. The idea that Western epistemologies undermine research across cultures is only intelligible within an intellectual framework that accepts Western epistemology, and that is what we’re committed to. I hope this is okay as a summary of what we are doing here and to start us off in the discussion. Thank you for your attention.

Claudia Derichs: Thanks a lot, Elísio [Macamo], this was very rich and dense. I think it will take us through the afternoon digesting it, but thanks for putting it in a ten-minute clip so wonderfully. To lead over to Nahed [Samour] to share her thoughts with us.

Nahed Samour: Thank you so much to all the organizers of this event and to the attendees. Allow me to present a current research project called ‘Theorizing from the Global South: An Arab Perspective’⁶ that is meant to be a contribution to the question as to why and how to theorize from a global South. While this perspective deals with ‘the gaze’ and investigates South–North transformations, it starts from the understanding that there is no way to simply ‘reverse the gaze’. The gaze, in the Foucauldian sense, posits that power lies at the root of the gaze. Theories around the gaze first centred on gendered power relations and later added racialized power relations to it. In this sense, the gaze is about making visible unequal relations of looking reproduced everywhere. There is no reversing the gaze as long as power asymmetry is prevalent. It is in this sense similar to

⁶ This research project brings together Arab and German academics and research institutions and is funded by the Arab–German Young Academy: <https://agya.info/research/research-projects-by-year/theorizing-in-a-global-world>.

the surveyor and surveyed, with the surveyor taking an active position and the surveyed becoming objectified.⁷

In this research project, I critically investigate transformations in Germany through an Arab view that is explicitly non-identitarian and uses the Arab not as a geographical or identitarian approach but much rather as an analytical approach,⁸ similar to how the global South emerged beyond a geographical category into an analytical category. It is thus a way to study Germany grounded in critical approaches to (il-)liberalism, secularism, racism and anti-, post- and decolonial theory. The idea is that these approaches to the German state, academy, the arts, feuilleton are analysed against the Arab world's own colonial and neo-colonial post-World War II trajectory and relation to Western Europe. This way, this perspective might allow for tracing the relationship between Germany, the Arab world and the global South and [to] see their link between powerful hegemony abroad and [the] effects it has on to racialized people in Germany. The research project is also trying to critically situate the Arab World between German memory politics and decolonial thought.

I will start by explaining why to turn to Germany and, second, how we can conceptually turn to Germany. For this, I will go to bell hooks's concept of the 'oppositional gaze', but we will complement that concept with Edward Said's 'adversarial critique'⁹ and 'adversarial resistance.'¹⁰ We might see how adversarial critique and resistance might function even in the face of lacking power. And so crucially, and for the purpose of this discussion, I will articulate the following idea: the approach of the research project is one that centres on how [the] liberal rule-of-law state exercises colonial violence with moral entitlement and masks the race/religion dimension,¹¹ normalizing violence inside and outside its borders, and thereby articulates German moral supremacy. Germany is actually here studied as a case of colonial modernity.¹²

7 Berger 1972, e.g. 46.

8 See Dallmeyer 1997, 34. Dallmeyer considers non-identity not as a counter-identity, or negation of identity or indifferent no-identity, but rather the active working through of the compositions of identity.

9 See Said 1989.

10 Said 1989, 219–20.

11 See also the 'Race–Religion Constellation Project' (RRC) hosted at Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands: 'It is only by revealing Europe's masked race-religion constellation that one can better understand the particular manifestations of past and present racism.' <https://racereligionresearch.org/>, accessed June 12, 2023.

12 See also Michaels and Salaymeh 2022.

So, why critically turn to Germany? Many colleagues from the Arab world, when they turn to the West, they turn to the USA, Canada and the UK, so I have to make the case here, why to turn to Germany. To answer this question, I turn to a debate that international legal scholars were having on the renowned ‘Verfassungsblog. On Matters Constitutional.’¹³ Here, Armin von Bogdandy, the director of the Max Planck Institute of Comparative Public and International Law Heidelberg, poses the question whether we are right now witnessing a German legal hegemony emerging. The examples he chooses refer to the German law within European Union law, and von Bogdandy states in 2020:

In the context of European integration, Charles de Gaulle from the outset understood Hallstein’s legal imaginations of the EEC as a tool for the pursuit of German interests. And today, the issue of German hegemony has been a recurrent theme ever since the financial crisis, and quite a few have even welcomed it as a sensible answer to the challenges of the future. As regards the legal field in particular, non-German lawyers report that the ‘German legal mindset’, which originates in German jurisprudence, has come to assert itself more and more in the legal services of European institutions. The professorial law of the Federal Constitutional Court dominates European discourses. Compared to other EU Member States, Germany probably invests the most resources in legal research as well as in propagating its legal thought. No other European country has set up institutions of the scale of the Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst, the Humboldt-Stiftung or the various foundations that allow for meaningful encounters of foreigners with German jurisprudence. Moreover, Brexit might weaken the British—and perhaps even the Anglo-American—dominance in pan-European jurisprudence, leaving a huge void that other forces could fill.¹⁴

Von Bogdandy thus shows how money and (academic) power help assert a German legal mindset and shape law within European institutions. This is accompanied by the fact that, post-World War II, the German constitution and fundamental rights are understood as very progressive, indeed as an answer to German fascism and National Socialism. Thus, attracting interest in German law came with promising a break from the past as well as centring the human (and human dignity) in the constitution. The human rights discourse later emerged as a key discourse of redemption, as we will see once I turn to the International Criminal Court.

I also want to refer to the fact that the Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) in Germany, in the last couple of years, has massively invested in English translators to have its decisions translated into English; and, interestingly, the recent German Federal Constitution Court’s decisions on climate change have immediately been

¹³ For details see Bogdandy 2020.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

translated by the Court itself into English, French and Spanish.¹⁵ The Court has stocked up immensely on translators so that Germany's law becomes *begriffs-bildend* [concept-moulding/-constitutive] for other constitutional courts of the world.

And there would be more here to add regarding other hegemonic moves emerging from Germany's [striving] to become a permanent member of the [United Nations] Security Council, its role in NATO-led military offensives, accompanied, or rather contrasted, by the huge German financial and personnel capacities in support of the International Criminal Court. Let me say that it remains a striking contrast of how prominent the role of law is in Germany's self-aggrandizement in supporting the International Criminal Court while it is currently busy sidelining international law and instead stressing the priority of a 'negotiated solution' with respect to current investigations of the International Criminal Court against Israel on war crimes (and perhaps crimes against humanity).¹⁶ This way, Germany is shielding a state that is declared constitutive for Germany's *raison d'état* (*Staatsräson*) from legal accountability through discursive and financial support. It remains a puzzle to see Germany both invested in shielding and thereby enabling illegal practices on the one hand and supporting human rights on the other, an impasse that can possibly be explained through economic might in being able to finance both. 'Reversing' here then means to see how human rights are not employed for ending international legal violations, as Germany keeps on reiterating, but rather a narrative that hides how Germany is increasingly entangled in these violations.

So, what critical concepts are there to help us to critically turn to Germany? What approaches for re-perspectivisation do we have? Is 'the gaze' a useful concept to do so? Concepts such as the 'male gaze' (Laura Mulvey), 'white gaze' (Frantz Fanon), 'oppositional gaze' (bell hooks), 'genocidal gaze' (Elizabeth R. Baer) have been used in order to decipher and name degrading as well as dehumanizing gaze regimes. But they rest with the perspective of the gazing position, the position of power. Can you 'reverse the gaze' when you are looking with the power that comes with gazing in the first place? I argue that you cannot reverse the gaze, just as you cannot reverse history, but instead need to show both the contingency of power, on the one hand, as well as stress analytical powers that are not tied to European hegemony (money and might) and instead highlight

¹⁵ BVerfG 2021.

¹⁶ With regard to Germany and the International Criminal Court on 'The Situation in the State of Palestine' see Burgis-Kasthala, Samour and Schwöbel-Patel 2023.

trans-historic and transnational ideas that are being buried by European hegemony.

First, I want to turn here to the concept of bell hooks, renowned black feminist, and investigate her concept of 'oppositional gaze' from her book *Grace and Representation* (1992), and then connect it to Edward Said's 'adversarial critique' and 'adversarial resistance' (1989). bell hooks, speaking as a black woman in the US, starts with speaking of looks that were seen as confrontational, as gestures of resistance, as challenges to authority.

There is power in looking. There is a traumatic relationship to the gaze. That all attempts to repress our right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire and oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: 'Not only will I stare, I want my look to change reality.' Even in the worst circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency.¹⁷

Even though bell hooks conflates looking (associated with the eye) and gazing (associated with the phallus, i.e., power), the decision to *not look away* 'in the face of structures of domination'¹⁸ is a move to face reality and face agency. In addition, she advises:

Look back and at one another, naming what we see. The gaze has been and is a sight of resistance for colonized people globally. Subordinates in relation of power learn experimentally there is a critical gaze, one that looks to document, one that is oppositional. And in resistance, the struggle, the power of the dominant to assert agency by claiming and cultivating awareness politicizes looking relations, one that learns to look in a certain way in order to resist. Looking as a way to contest, to confront, looking as a way to resist.¹⁹

I want to take bell hooks's 'looking/gazing' to document, to contest, to confront, to resist with Edward Said's perspective here. Edward Said, Palestinian-American literary critic and anti-colonial theorist, explored that 'the native point of view ... is not an ethnographic fact only, ...it is in still large measure a continuing, protracted and sustained adversarial resistance'²⁰ to academic, cultural and political discourses of domination.

And so, more acute than ever, it is critical to underscore how the position standpoint and perspective of the 'native' is not an identitarian one that can be

¹⁷ hooks 1999, 307; see also hooks 1992, 115–31.

¹⁸ hooks 1999, 309.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Said 1989, 319, 210.

reduced to ethnic, racial or national(ist) identity; it is first and foremost the position of the dominated, oppressed and colonized, or the unequal. And it is the standpoint of bodies that are marked for maiming, killing and erasure, on whatever territory they stand. So this is precisely not an identitarian position. Sociologist Mark Ayyash stresses that this perspective 'launches a committed rounded and adversarial resistance to empire,'²¹ be it democratic and liberal or else.

The Palestinian resistance to Israeli domination is exactly that: the embodiment of a decolonial alternative to the world of colonial modernity, which is based on an instrumental rationality that drives and maximizes domination, control and supremacy overall, whilst minimizing responsibility, negating international state obligations. And this is where Germany comes in: enabling perpetuated colonial continuities and giving this domination a modern gloss and thereby performing moral supremacy. If we respond seriously to the most recent calls from students to decolonize our university, then we cannot exclude Palestinian resistance for liberation. At the same time, we need to critically discuss the conflation of anti-Semitism with support for the Palestine struggle as well as questions of solidarity and respect for international law. But because the 'gaze' as a metaphor cannot brush aside power asymmetries, it becomes evident that those 'staring back' are being hit hard by hegemonic powers, on whatever territory they stand on, be it democratic and liberal or else.²²

Claudia Derichs: Thank you, Nahed [Samour], for sharing this with us. What stuck in my mind is in fact the very term of the 'gaze,' which both of you referred to. Let me ask Elísio [Macamo], what are then the forms and sides of gazing to focus on when we come back to your thinking? We heard from Nahed [Samour] that she took from bell hooks the idea of using and maybe even instrumentalizing the gaze as a means of opposition, of confrontation, of resistance. Is this similar in your way of thinking or would you say 'No, my understanding of the gaze is yet a different one?'

Elísio Macamo: Thank you, Claudia, and thank you, Nahed [Samour], for a very interesting presentation there. And in fact, I will draw from one concept you used, Nahed [Samour], which I think helps me to explain what we're doing here in Basel.

At one point in your presentation, Nahed, you said that Germany's law is becoming *begriffsbildend*. I translate that as conceptually constitutive, right? What I like about that concept is how it encourages us to look at concepts as ways

²¹ Ayyash 2021.

²² Tzuberi and Samour 2022.

of making the world, world-making, as it were. And I like that because I think what we're doing here in Basel is basically accepting that our world was made by concepts produced in particular places. And then we want to see how that was possible, so, what questions made those concepts useful to make the world, as it were, and to render the world intelligible?

Perhaps we might differ slightly in terms of emphasis, and now I'm thinking of the concepts you used from bell hooks's 'oppositional gaze' and Edward Said's 'adversarial resistance.' I don't know if this is a fundamental difference. My impression is that it's not, but it's definitely a different kind of emphasis that I place. ... What makes me slightly shifty about the 'oppositional gaze' and the 'adversarial resistance' is, if you like, a slightly different commitment, which I think I have, to ways of world-making. ... These concepts that have been used to make the world we live in may be limited in their scope, but they have enormous potential to help us make better worlds from them. I don't think this is what the concepts you use imply, but in political discourse, this is what they often imply, that we should actually ditch them, abandon them, right? And perhaps even find different concepts to think of better worlds. So, Claudia, that's my idea of the 'gaze.' That's why I say we are reversing the gaze – we are reversing the gaze in order to free the concepts from unnecessary baggage which they have and then pursue them.

Claudia Derichs: Thank you. I take this with me – free the concept from unnecessary baggage, that's a wonderful expression. Nahed, I'm wondering, would that speak to you as well since you were more context-sensitive in your explanation and giving the concrete example including what we find these days in the media, the very dominant gaze on what is going on in Palestine and Israel?

Nahed Samour: I want to connect to what Elísio [Macamo] just said, and I'm sensing this kind of conversation unfolding, so I am really grateful to have this opportunity.

I want to go back to the 'gaze.' Which un-useful concepts do we need to ditch? But there are also concepts that have huge potential, and I want to go back to what Elísio [Macamo] said: which concepts deserve our attention? And I have to say that one of the examples – I'm sorry, you will sense that I come from the discipline of law – but one of these concepts that is discussed right now is 'apartheid.' In one of the leading books on international criminal law, written by my colleagues at Humboldt University, German criminal lawyers are wondering, why did the word 'apartheid' make it as a legal concept into the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court? These German lawyers say apartheid at present has primarily symbolic significance, and it only made it into the Rome Statute

because some African states wanted it to be there.²³ The very term 'symbolic' strips the term of its hard legal, doctrinal content, namely that of a crime against humanity. In fact, article 7 paragraph 2 h) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines the crime of apartheid as 'inhumane acts of a character similar to those referred to in paragraph 1, committed in the context of an institutionalised regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime.'²⁴

Does it do justice to call this crime 'symbolic' when apartheid is prohibited in universally ratified treaties, such as the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (1965)? Apartheid is also listed as a grave breach in the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (AP1, 1977). Apartheid was defined as a crime against humanity in the International Convention for the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (1973), and in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998). Apartheid is also prohibited by customary international law and is a violation of *jus cogens* ('compelling law'). So, what message is it sending to consider a crime 'symbolic' against the backdrop of international legal conventions? Is this not an anti-legal move of reading international law, one that does not do justice to the discipline or to international law, something Germany is, in its official and legal parlance, committed to?

And if you look now, where is the decolonial attention for international law, the Third World approaches to international law? It is coming back to that term and making sure that this term, while it is an Afrikaans word, we have to turn this very historical, though not exclusive experience of South Africa into a legal term.²⁵ And, most recently, as the latest moment it came into the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; it showed the world that it is a legal term, and that it can transform historic experience of injustice into legality to analyse present situations. It is here that we see the resistance to transform non-European experiences into universal, international law. While reversing the attention back

²³ Werle and Jessberger 2020, here: sec. 875, p. 872.

²⁴ Article 7 para. 2 h), Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; see also Amnesty International 2017.

²⁵ The 'Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid' (United Nations 1973) in article 1 says 'apartheid, such as in South Africa,' i.e., using South Africa as one example. Thus, the term arguably applies also to Namibia, Rhodesia, Mozambique and Angola, which is why Portugal voted against this convention. See Clark 2008, 603; and UN "Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid," accessed June 12, 2023.

to Germany, it becomes clear that hegemony, often intensified in its alliance with the European Union, can have many forms, amongst which are, until now, the academic, legal and political. Rather than analysing the ‘global South’ from a German perspective, we need to understand how hegemonic centres shield away from responsibility and accountability. Gazing at centres of power does not undo their power; they can only help provide a more factual starting point for our much needed conversations.

Concluding Reflections After the Conversation

Elísio Macamo: Everything I have said corresponds to how I approach teaching because I want students to become aware of how our methods of knowing are intimately linked with our ways of not knowing and, in this sense, how, at times, we deploy knowledge to celebrate our ignorance. The goal is not to make students cynical about knowledge. Instead, it is to warn them to be suspicious of any claim to innocence concepts can have, not because they are ‘Western’ or ‘racist,’ but rather because they are instances of bad scholarship. So, I ask them not to take the world rendered visible by concepts for granted without first inquiring into the overall framework within which those concepts acquire meaning.

My point, therefore, is this: there is no such thing as knowledge of Africa. Instead, what we describe as knowledge of Africa is the process through which we constitute Africa as an object. Studying Africa is engaging in the gratifying work of the methodology of the social sciences.²⁶ It is reminding ourselves that when we say we are studying Africa, we are getting ready to do so. Until we have found a way of talking about ourselves which is not hostage to that from which we seek to escape, we cannot say that we are studying Africa. And the thing with this thought is that we may realise that to study Africa properly, we may need to commit ourselves to doing away with it.

I must admit that this is a development I would welcome because next to the difficulty of becoming a scholar in Europe when you are from Africa – i.e. learning to work in a language which is not the language you grew up speaking at home with your parents, siblings, friends and relatives, mastering the writings and thoughts of people who are closer to your colleagues’ and most of your students’ culture than yours, working with colleagues who, unlike you, grew up in academic or intellectual families – so, next to all these difficulties, you still have

²⁶ Macamo 2016.

to come to terms with the burden of willy-nilly representing Africa in complete visibility because you're the conspicuous black dot in a pink sea and, therefore, realizing that whatever you do, good or bad, will always reflect negatively, or positively, on an entire continent and 'race.' It is not just hard. It is painful. And in an academic world awash with moral grandstanding, being an African academic in this part of the world is committing to a life on the tightrope or walking in a veritable minefield. I wish I were simply a sociologist, just like most of my colleagues.

Nahed Samour: As Germany is slowly engaging with its coloniality,²⁷ it is an important reminder that 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.'²⁸ In their powerfully written and much discussed work, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) strongly state that any form of using the term 'decolonization' without the repatriation of indigenous land and life isn't the work of decolonisation. In fact, easily grafting 'to decolonize' or 'decolonization' onto any existing colonial theoretic framework (even if it's human rights or a social justice framework) could be another form of 'looking away' from dismantling settler colonisation. Tuck and Yang clearly state that '[t]he aim of decolonisation is to unsettle power relations, in real and material ways. Decolonisation should bring about the repatriation of indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things that we want to do to improve our societies.'²⁹ Critically turning to Germany, then, means that those holding on to Germany's official *Staatsräson* (*raison d'état*) have to seriously rethink how this doctrine supports or undermines worldwide efforts of decolonisation.

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²⁷ Anonymous 2020.

²⁸ Tuck and Yang 2012.

²⁹ See <https://cire-bristol.com/2020/12/15/decolonization-is-not-a-metaphor/>, accessed June, 7 2023.

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Part Two: **Reflections**

Fatima Alvarez Castillo*

The Conflicted Decolonial Scholar

A Journey Through the Dialectics of Becoming, Un-becoming and Being, in Struggle with the People

My country, the Philippines, was first colonised by Spain from the 16th century onwards, then by the United States at the turn of the 19th century, a period that ended with ‘flag independence’¹ in 1946 after a 3-year occupation by the Japanese imperial army.² This colonised history has left a legacy in my mind that coexists with imprints of my people’s rich history, inherited stories and imaginations, my lived experience; and colonial mentality.

In my mind persist stories of Filipino heroes walking to the garrotte or facing the coloniser’s firing squad, heads held high; of the insurrecto’s hands weakened with hunger and disease, holding tight an old carbine in mountains and fields across the islands. In my father’s and brothers’ stories are themes of our great ancient people – brave, free, attractive, strong... of guerrillas who valiantly held off the Japanese practically with their bare hands; of peasants who fought the fire-power of the Americans with bolos. Juxtaposed with memories from these stories, though, are my memories from childhood, of statues at home of white-skinned Jesus and Mary, of myself singing the ‘Star Spangled Banner’ every morning on the primary school grounds, being fined by teachers for speaking the local language instead of English, learning that we had been introduced to civilisation and democracy by the US. Internalising the idea, always present everywhere, that whiteness is a privileged skin colour. At home, in school, in church, in jokes, in fairy tales, this is the ontology. Capécia apparently was present also in my childhood.³

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1 ‘Flag independence’ refers to the token recognition by the US of Philippine independence; it is widely known that the US continues to wield tremendous influence on the government.

2 Japan, entering into an alliance with Mussolini and Hitler, which carved up the world into their desired enclaves of control, wanted to be an Asian colonial power.

3 Mayotte Capécia is the pen name of Lucette Ceranus, author of the 1948 semi-autobiographical novel *I Am a Martinican Woman*. Fanon refers to this book to describe the feelings of self-hatred that colonialism instils in black women, encouraging them to pursue white men at any cost, even when this leads to unhealthy relationships and eventual abandonment. LitCharts “Mayotte

In this paper, I am bringing you along with me in my personal journey to illustrate that the scholar is a bearer of both colonial and liberatory consciousnesses that coexist. I wish to show how the scholar is heir to colliding histories, that this inheritance is often not recognised but suffered, and how, eventually, liberatory tendencies take precedence. I want to tell of the reflexive lesson-learning that characterises my scholarship. As I am a senior academic in the most prestigious university in the country, influencing colleagues and students here and abroad as a scholar-educator, getting to know my complex conflicted cognitive inheritances is an initial step toward ethical and humane scholarship. I am thinking that, for me to contribute meaningfully to decolonial work, I first must recognise and deal with the fact that I am both the object and subject of the decolonial project.

Drawing from my own story, backgrounded by my country's history, I write about two strands of thought, one holding that (1) the decolonial scholar in the South is a bearer of colonial mentality while attempting to create liberatory scholarship in complex, conflicted, step-wise processes; and another contending that (2) this internal conflict is acted out in the overlapping, and also colliding fields of research and ethics. Toward the end of your journey with me, I will point to a discovery: I found my mooring by taking part in my people's struggle for liberation. The scholarship, therefore, that I have affinity with and am working for is necessarily insurgent.

Why from my story? Because it is a most familiar terrain. I want to illustrate as well the fusion of the personal and political, of biography and history, of the small and large, of mentality and structures. Besides, telling personal stories is an act of reflexivity. Finally, if I am to describe conflicted consciousness, it has to be mine. (I have no privilege speaking about other people's conflicted consciousness.)

Now we start the journey.

Conflicted Inheritances: Colonised and Liberatory

Colonial mentality is the term used by Filipino nationalists in reference to colonised consciousness. Jose Rizal,⁴ Filipino intellectual-philosopher-activist of the

Capécia (Lucette Ceranus): Character Analysis." <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/black-skin-white-masks/characters/mayotte-capecia-lucette-ceranus>, accessed May 29, 2022.

⁴ He was the best evidence of the falsehood of the colonisers' narrative about the inferiority of Filipinos. Intellectually gifted, he was a physician, spoke ten languages fluently, was able to converse in another twelve; an experimental scientist, a teacher, sculptor, musician, celebrated epis-

Philippine revolution against Spanish colonialism, caricatured the native elite for their futile attempts to look and sound Spanish, a point which Frantz Fanon, over half a century later, would theorise in *Black Skin, White Masks*.⁵

In the late 19th century, in the essay “The Philippines: A Century Hence,” influenced by progressive thought and events in Europe, Rizal foretold the emergence of Filipino consciousness for nationhood and independence, that they will rise and fight for freedom. His novels, *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891), had a tremendous impact on Filipino revolutionary consciousness. In August 1896, the Philippine revolution against European colonisation, the first in Asia, broke out, led by the underground organisation, Katipunan, organised by Andres Bonifacio and deeply influenced by Rizal.⁶ The revolution cut across social classes and ethnicities. At the age of thirty-five, Rizal was executed by the Spaniards in December 1896. The execution swelled the ranks of revolutionaries.

Among the colonised, recognising the falsity of claims of racial superiority-inferiority, and in their place holding up truths about human dignity and agency and risking one’s life to claim them does not happen in a single spark nor does it come from one great idea. These interlinked phenomena have many sources and multiple processes. Thus for example, while European colonisers abused countless peoples in the world, the decolonial project can trace among its headwaters the progressive-humanist ideas of European scholar-activists. Among those who influenced Rizal’s thinking were Pi y Margall, Spanish liberal, socialist and anarchist leader of the short-lived Spanish revolution against the monarchy,⁷ thinkers of the Enlightenment⁸ like Victor Hugo, Voltaire, even Friedrich Engels⁹ and Rudolf Virchow. These thinkers, too, are among the sources of my standpoint. In the belly of the beast are comrades for liberation.

tolary writer, playwright, poet, essayist, and novelist in both Spanish and Tagalog. De Stephano 2015. Rizal is the first intellectual in Southeast Asia to think systematically about social and political issues. His thoughts about the nature of Filipino colonial society laid the foundations for an original Southeast Asian sociology of colonial society. See Alatas 2011. Rizal was actively supported by many intellectual-activists in Europe at that time, where he studied and lived for several years, and where his political program was formed.

5 It is quite interesting that among the leading decolonial thinkers are Mignolo, Quijano, and Maldonado Torres who are from countries colonised by Spain and which are now objects of US imperialist interventionism, just like the Philippines. As interesting, Rizal was a medical doctor, like Fanon. The symbolism is striking: Rizal was a doctor of the eyes, Fanon of the mind.

6 Quibuyen 2021.

7 Araneta 2021.

8 Sicat 2019.

9 Quibuyen 2021.

Decolonial scholarship is not defined by geography or race or historical period. It goes deep back in history, enriched by various races, peoples, histories, stories and geographies. It is a project, not only of and for the colonised but of and for humanity.

When the Philippine revolution against Spain was rapidly gaining ground, in large part inspired by Rizal's martyrdom, in 1899, the US and Spain made a deal for a mock battle that would end in the latter's defeat. In turn, Spain was paid \$20 million by the US and guaranteed protection of Catholic Church and Spanish properties in the colony. The islands became a US colony in the Pacific. Filipino revolutionaries continued the fight for independence, this time against the new oppressors.

There was public uproar in the US over reports of American troops' brutalities against Filipinos. Many Americans strongly opposed US colonisation of my country, including the writer Mark Twain. Despite their well-reasoned arguments, including the use of principles from the US Declaration of Independence, their government took no heed. Instead, President McKinley, after paying Spain for the Philippines, said it was the US' 'Manifest Destiny' to civilise the Filipinos. In 1902, speaking before the graves of American soldiers in Arlington, Virginia, President Theodore Roosevelt framed the Filipino-American war as a race war, as "the triumph of civilisation over forces which stand for the black chaos of savagery and barbarism."¹⁰

While Filipino resistance ebbed, notably after the surrender of Emilio Aguinaldo¹¹ to the Americans, and the collaboration of many local elite personalities like the *hacenderos*¹² in my home island, Negros, many Filipinos continued the resistance. Notable are Macario Sakay and Miguel Malvar who, unlike many other revolutionary leaders, refused to accept US offers of a government post in exchange for their surrender. In Negros, the healer (*babaylan*) Papa Isio,¹³ who came from a very poor family, having mobilised peasants, sugar workers and

10 "Remarks on Memorial Day in Arlington." *The American Presidency Project*. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/343493>, accessed May 5, 2023.

11 Aguinaldo became the leader of the Philippine revolution against Spain after the assassination of Bonifacio. There is credible historical evidence that the assassination was done with the knowledge of Aguinaldo.

12 Owners of large tracts of land, usually planted with sugar cane and rice. *Hacenderos* were mostly creoles (of European descent born in the Philippines), and, later, US-American and Chinese families.

13 Alvarez-Castillo 1989.

*montañosas*¹⁴ against the Spaniards, waged a class-based war for independence until his surrender and imprisonment.

Among the first programmes of the US in the Philippines was public education.¹⁵ It established schools including the University of the Philippines (UP). *Pensionados* (scholars) were sent to study in US universities. Up until the 1980s, the most prestigious professors in UP were the *pensionados*. They were seen as the most advanced in knowledge and pedagogy. The goal of the US-American education program was to develop a class of Filipinos whose mentality was Americanised and who would be loyal to the United States.¹⁶

After just a little over three decades of American occupation, the Philippines, hosting the US' two biggest overseas military bases, was bombed by Japan right after Pearl Harbour, followed by Japanese troops landing on the islands. Just about three months into the war, in March 1942, the US military, led by General Douglas MacArthur, left, leaving Filipinos to fight on our own. Filipinos fought valiantly against the Japanese troops. The revolutionaries against US colonialism shifted focus to fight the Japanese. My father himself was a guerrilla fighter. About a million Filipinos died. When MacArthur returned in 1944, he announced via radio: "People of the Philippines. I have returned." The people rejoiced, welcoming the chief implementer of US-American imperialism in Asia, believing he was our saviour.

The United States is glorified in the country. This was the narrative I grew up with/in having been born during 'peace time'¹⁷ in a lower middle class family. Up until high school, my dream was to study in the US and marry a US-American, imagining them to be the best of the male species.

My parents had decided early on that each of us their children would get a university degree despite our meagre means. Still alive in my memory are lectures of my father, the intellectual in our family, that the only way for us to have a better life than what we were having was to get a university degree, the passport to a bright future. My father, a high school graduate at the top of his class, and my mother, a public elementary school teacher, inspired, cajoled and exhorted us, with assurance that no one would stop their schooling for lack of finances; and we had the freedom to choose the kind of studies we wanted. But he emphasised

14 A mixed group of rebels, thieves, deserters who escaped from Spanish authorities and hid in the hinterlands.

15 Filipino historian Renato Constantino calls this 'mis-education.'

16 The huge success of this project is evidenced by Philippine academia's adherence to and imitation of US-American universities' systems, standards, and culture of scholarship up to this day.

17 The folk term for the few years after the Second World War.

that we choose a career that would ensure we would not have masters; that we would be free agents. He told us of the indignities of being a peon, a paid servant of sugar-baron families. At seven years old, I already had teachings from him about agency. I also grew up with his stories about the oppression and exploitation of sugar cane workers by *hacenderos*. I remember his passionate anger at the injustice of it all.

My undergraduate college education at the University of the Philippines, the premier state university in the country, did not do much to shatter my ‘American dream.’ What did was the education from my students in the early 1970s, what we now term the *First Quarter Storm*, the height of student activism against US imperialism¹⁸ and its local partner, Ferdinand Marcos. It was my first teaching year in a provincial campus of UP. I was only two to three years older than my undergraduate students in political science, many of whom were from the upper middle classes and candidates for Latin honours when they graduate from university. Several of them did not. They dropped out of university when Marcos declared martial law, and activists were rounded up, imprisoned, tortured, disappeared, and murdered in the thousands. Some died fighting Marcos’ troops.¹⁹ But back to my education.

There were heated discussions in class, as my students questioned and critiqued my lessons, mostly taken from textbooks in political science authored by US-Americans, the same textbooks my political science professors used. The students’ irreverence often angered me. Yet, they waited for me after class to continue the discussion. They gave me writings of Renato Constantino,²⁰ Jose Ma Sison,²¹ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Mao Tse Tung, materials about the theology of liberation,²² among others. “Please, mam, read them, and then we talk,” they said.

18 The US, after the Second World War, became the leading global power, having transformed from a colonial-mercantilist power to capitalist-imperialist power. It henceforth behaved as a rapacious, exploitative military-industrial hegemon.

19 The brutal dictatorship was met by an intensified people’s movement for liberation from the stranglehold of feudal landownership, a monopoly of political power by a small class of compradors and capitalists, and US-American imperialism. A broad united front of peasants, workers, intelligentsia, students and youth, progressive religious sectors, indigenous peoples, was formed that continued even after the fall of the Marcos’ dictatorship.

20 Influential Filipino public intellectual who changed the perspective of countless Filipino youth on the nature of American-Filipino relationship.

21 He founded the new Communist Party of the Philippines and led the youth movement for the establishment of national democracy in the country.

22 In the late 1960s, activist-priests in the Philippines, who were mostly involved in the Church’s social action programs, were intently following the developments in Latin America, especially

They invited me to join discussion groups organised by students and some teachers; I watched them in various places on the campus, huddled in small groups, intently discussing, from dusk till dark. I started reading their materials; joining their discussion groups and then I joined the rallies, wrote manifestoes and did more. Thus began my education from my students on US imperialism, colonial mentality and more. And my involvement in the movement for national liberation.

Layers and threads of overlapping, intersecting and colliding inheritances of ontologies, epistemologies and ethics, from our childhood stories to history subjects in high school and university to our professional work are sources of a core perspective which we use to view the world and guide our practice.

So where does my almost reflex reaction of outrage to suffering, acts of cruelty and injustice come from? From my people's history and heroes? My father's stories? From my brothers' tales about Hiawatha, Ivanhoe, my mother's abiding grace and quiet grit, her prayers to the Virgin and the crucified (white) Christ? From my students' martyrdom? My own life experiences? From these and more. In other words, without design, despite (or perhaps, because of) my colliding inheritances, I have formed a standpoint that aligns with justice, kindness and dignity. Much of this, I suppose, was because my scholarship was grounded in the actual struggle of my people against local and foreign oppression.

The scholar is both the subject and object of the decolonial project; she carries the colonial consciousness, but must liberate herself from it by recognising it, turning it around while engaging at the same time in the process of constructing/forming ideas, recognitions – consciousness; thus the liberatory project seeks to recognise what is veiled. Our struggle to decolonise our world cannot happen without our struggle to decolonise ourselves in dialectical fashion.

This is thus not a straightforward process; there are twists and turns, maybe sometimes painful. The intellectual needs to turn herself against herself and be her most intense critic, for there are so many layers of false (and cruel) consciousness interwoven into our psyche. This is a constant struggle within ourselves, habits, and predispositions. Fanon said: The goal of this attitude is “nothing less than the liberation of the black man from himself.”²³ So, too, the scholar; so, too, in research and ethics.

after the Second Vatican Council. Several of them joined the New People's Army as one way of living in practice the philosophy of Gustavo Gutierrez' *A Theology of Liberation*.

23 Fanon 1986, xii.

The Conflicted Arena of Research and Ethics

With the constant funding drought for research in the university, it was common among those who have not yet established a track record in research to unquestioningly accept offers to be a part of studies that many times were initiated and designed by scholars in US universities. Often the only thing that mattered was ‘do we think the project is worth doing and can we do it?’ This, and the older, submerged conception of American scholarship as superior, which I had absorbed since childhood, strengthened and polished during my college education and by the university’s subculture of academic excellence, explain why I never thought of asking why those we would study had no participation at all in designing the projects we were to implement. The subconscious colonised strand of mentality kicked in, despite the fact that I was already an activist.

A story illustrates this. In the 1990s, HIV/AIDS was a major concern, especially in the United States. Little was known about the nature, cause, and transmission of HIV/AIDS; there was a lot of fear, victim-blaming and prejudice. Among the projects that received funding were efforts to prevent the spread of the virus among what were seen as high-risk groups. Commercial sex workers had been identified as a high-risk group. They were among those targeted for education about HIV/AIDS toward behavioural change.

As a component of a multidisciplinary project, I led a social science team that aimed to educate and train female commercial sex workers (CSWs) working in clubs in Manila, on HIV/AIDS prevention. This was among the then fashionable prevention strategies in the US, from where the project funding came. With the funding also came the project design. After introducing ourselves and our project to the women, as an initial strategy, we tried to familiarise ourselves with their workplace and work conditions. The women later told us that, when they first saw us enter the clubs, by the way we were dressed, they thought we were Born Again bible teachers. This gives you an idea how ignorant or insensitive we were.²⁴ We asked them to attend a meeting where we provided an overview of HIV/AIDS, how it is transmitted and how transmission can be prevented. We also discussed the project in more detail. This was followed by several meetings during which we learned about each of them, including how and why they had entered this work. Then we made tentative lists of the women we would recruit as peer educators, following a set of criteria for selection. The peer educators would educate other CSWs about HIV/AIDS and methods of prevention, which included

²⁴ I am reconstructing this from distant memory, so there might be errors with a few details, but none with the story line and the core issues.

condom-use for the male clients. Then we did in-depth individual interviews with the candidate-peer educators, which we used in making the final list.²⁵

From about 20 women in the cohort, six eventually became peer educators. After they accepted the offer, we gave them additional education and trainings, such as on how to negotiate for non-penetrative sex or for using condoms. The idea was for them to pass on the learnings and skills to other CSWs. The training included putting the condom on the penis of the customer without them being aware of it (given the prevalent male opposition to condom use).²⁶ We brought them to trainings, lectures, conferences and workshops. We gave them easy to use/read education materials on HIV/AIDS. We provided them a cash allowance for going around the joints and skipping work so that they could undertake peer education and training continuously.

During the first two months, we had periodic assessment meetings with them. Then, about three months later, we learned that: (a) two women had been beaten by male customers when they realised that the condom has been placed on their penis; (b) several women had lost regular customers because they tried to negotiate for non-penetrative sex; and (c) the peer educators had become targets of envy and hostility from other women in our cohort because they were perceived to have received favoured treatment from the project. Very few of the peer educators have remained active.

I was shocked, ashamed and humbled. At this time, I was only beginning to learn about feminist research and feminist ethics from US-American feminists (primarily via the Ford Foundation Philippine program officer, Nicola Jones, an US-American feminist who was funding my transdisciplinary work in health). We scrambled about; sought advice from colleagues and local women's rights organisers. But we failed to salvage the project.

Let me now proceed to a much later research experience.

About twenty years later, I was the principal investigator and team leader for the Philippines of a multi-phased, multi-country research aimed to produce a gender-fair measurement of poverty. (We called this project FemPov.) After several meetings of all the country teams, during which there was intensive discussion

²⁵ There was no practice as yet of ethics review nor of formal, documented prior informed consent taking.

²⁶ We used a wooden, look-alike penis during the training. We often had them in our bags, so that, from school we could proceed to the training sessions. One time, when I opened my bag to take out my purse in a public transport to pay fare, I was shocked to see the penis in my bag. I must have been in such a hurry that I forgot that I had placed it there after the training session with the girls the previous night. The girls work at night till early morning, and sleep during the day. So our trainings had to be in the evenings.

on every aspect of the project – from the technical to the paradigmatic, methodology and ethics – the project was submitted to and subsequently funded by the Australian Research Council. Colleagues at the Australian National University (ANU) led the project. Aside from the Philippines, three countries in Africa and two in Southeast Asia took part. Among our consultants were esteemed feminists and philosopher-activists. We partnered with an international women’s NGO.

In the first two phases of the study, we did three case studies: a rural poor community, an urban poor community and a highly marginalised community (i.e., we studied the Bajau in Mindanao).²⁷ We did focus group discussions (FGDs) with boys separately from girls, and similarly with men and women. We also had individual key informant interviews with women and men from the communities who gave us insightful and nuanced data about their experience and conceptualisation of poverty, with particular interest in how gender particularises poverty. Our key questions in the first two phases were: what is poverty? And what is needed to get out of poverty? Our study passed two layers of ethics review: the local Philippine ethics review committee and the ethics committee at the ANU.

In the Philippine team, we took stock of our own individual worldview and standpoint on poverty. At certain junctures during field work, we, as a team, shared beliefs, attitudes, uncertainties about the emerging findings. In short, we tried to know more about ourselves, especially our deep-seated beliefs on poverty, in preparation for the tasks ahead. Maybe this can be termed group reflexivity? The idea was to have a team unified on the fundamentals of studying poverty: why study how the poor conceptualise poverty; how women and men, boys and girls experience it; what is the justice of this study? How best can we represent, and how fair can we be in representing, their notions and experiences of poverty?

By this time, for about two decades since the HIV/AIDS project, I had been working on formal research ethics, primarily in policy and standard-setting for ethics review, and in the training of researchers and ethics reviewers. I had also already internalised some key perspectives in intersectionality theory, transdisciplinarity, radical feminism, Marxist anthropology, to name some. These have merged with earlier strands from liberation theology, Freirean pedagogy, Fanon-

²⁷ The *Bajau*, indigenous peoples in southern Philippines, used to live in boats and in coastal areas, as their food and livelihood were dependent on the sea. Years of armed conflict between the Moro liberation fighters and the state, plus predations by pirates, forced many to move to various parts of the country. Our case community has been living in a garbage dump on a coast of a city in Mindanao, having temporarily been allowed to stay there by the city government after several attempts to return them to their previous place of residence failed.

ian critique, indigenous epistemologies and the much earlier learnings from my childhood, my students, from comrades, researches and other engagements.

Our personal and collective preparations, particularly our ethics, were tested several times during the project. I give details of two tests.

During our interviews with one of our key informant women in the urban community, we learned that she was a victim of repeated violence from her male partner. We were not surprised (having educated ourselves about the lives of women in poverty), but we were troubled nonetheless. We stopped the data collection temporarily; talked to her, told her about the law that she could use to defend herself. We offered to link her to support groups that provide services, including legal aid. We wanted to convey to her that our concern for her safety was greater than our interest in finishing the interviews. After some time, though, she decided that she wouldn't take any of our offers and suggestions. We said we fully understood. I thought then, yes, she can bring the partner to court at best, but how about her children? How much change in her life would external help provide? Perhaps she was thinking along the same lines, too. This was a major concrete lesson on the infirmity of laws in the lives of women in extreme poverty and vulnerability.

The second test was in the Bajau community. We learned that because there was no clean water service in this community, they (usually the boys) had to get water from a government-installed facility located in the community of Bisaya.²⁸ And it was their usual experience to be bullied by the Bisaya children. Inspired by the idea in *Relief of Oppression*,²⁹ after discussion with the Bajaus and getting their approval, we negotiated with colleagues at the ANU to allow us to use part of our project funds to set up a water supply facility in the Bajau community. This is because we expected that, although we would lobby the local government to install such a facility, the process would be quickened if we put in counter-part funding as a donation from the project. True enough, the water service was installed in less than a year.³⁰

28 *Bisaya* is a term referring to descendants of migrants from the Visayas Islands. They are also poor, but not as marginalised and discriminated against as the *Bajau*; they happened to be the majority ethnic group in the area.

29 Lavery and Bandewar 2010.

30 Up till now, our project colleagues continue their partnership with the Bajau community. Led by Nimfa Bracamonte, they have set up an NGO (Friends of Bajau-Iligan) that initiates fundraising projects with the full participation of the Bajau, and never as a dole out.

Learnings From the Stories

The two stories of the CSW and FemPov are less polar opposites than nodes in a continuing process of unlearning and learning. The first story demonstrated the dangers of assuming the academic's a priori expertise and privileged role in formal knowledge production. Second, I had to develop the courage to critique packaged projects (that in particular tend to use powerless groups as guinea pigs for testing intervention designs),³¹ even if this could mean the project being offered to someone else in the country, where hunger for research funding is enormous. Conversely, if more Filipino scholars critically examine predesigned projects and/or actively participate in the development of project designs, funders and academics in the Global North would learn to behave as partners.

The second story, while more flattering than the first for our efforts and sensitivity, underscores the painful reality that extreme deprivation makes it impossible for externally initiated, piecemeal reforms to make a meaningful impact on the life of the poorest of the poor and highly marginalised. Aside from the terrible sense of helplessness regarding the victim of partner abuse, this realisation came to me fully some years later, when I was conversing with a leader of women CSWs³² in what is popularly known as the largest community of sex workers in Nairobi. After she told me about their HIV/AIDS prevention project, I told her that their approach was very similar to what we had done in Manila. I then told her about the experiences of the women in our project (e.g., being beaten, losing regular customers as the men simply went to other bars/women). She laughed. Then she said the words that I consider to be among the most important words in my unlearning, and which up till now I often cite in research and ethics trainings I give: "Here, no customer will be entertained if he will not use the condom. There is no use going to another joint (club/bar) or woman. He won't have a woman. Here we are organised." Yes of course! I suddenly grasped a fundamental fact. Why train the women to dupe the men so that they can protect themselves³³ from

31 Only much later did I realise that that project was part of the programme to develop and test social intervention designs to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, then a major problem in the US.

32 I was there as advisor for the project on benefit-sharing funded by the European Commission, with case studies in Kenya, South Africa, and India, led by Doris Schroeder of the University of Central Lancashire. The CSWs were part of a study to develop a vaccine for HIV/AIDS using genetic samples from the women.

33 One example is for the women to intoxicate the customers so that they won't notice the condom being put on them or that they won't be able to do penetrative sex. What happened, however, many times was that the women got drunk ahead of the customers and failed to use the condom.

infection (as we had tried to do)! Our focus should have been the men and their responsibility in the sexual transaction. But, of course, the project design imported from the US was strongly biased against women, and especially women commercial sex workers, a posture I failed to recognise at that time.

This is one key lesson that threads through my two stories: when project participants are members of organizations, they are able to take meaningful roles in research such as in participating in the formulation of project objectives, of the project design and in the sharing of benefits from the project. This resonates with my experience with people's organizations (POs) in the Philippines with whom I did pro bono research who also used the study findings to capacitate their members. Not only that they had a primary role in determining the objectives of the study, the POs also used the findings to educate, capacitate and organise. In short, this kind of work puts research data in the hands of the people. Ultimately, this is how research ought to be valued – how has it made the world a little less unjust and inhuman. This brings me to the collision of research and ethics.

When we got involved with the battered woman respondent and the plight of the Bajau, we could be criticised for abandoning the rule of distancing ourselves from our subjects to maintain scientific objectivity. Our data analysis could have been clouded by our emotional and mental involvement. To this, I say there are methods and procedures, including reflexivity, transparency and triangulation developed by feminist and other engaged researchers, that would ensure scientific soundness.³⁴ These procedures do not require neutrality in the face of injustice or suffering. I say further that our research ethics should help us clarify to ourselves: what is the relevance of my work to those who are being victimised? Research ethics is (or must be) about justice, solidarity, caring and empathy. In decolonial scholarship, questions we may consider for our methods of work and our ethics are: for what and for whom is our decolonial work? How best do we carry it out toward this end?

Threading through our world view, epistemology and methodology is our ethics. Our intellectual project and our ethics and our politics are intertwined. The decolonial programme, at its most basic, is a programme of ethics. By this, I mean not the technical, narrow ethics from Europe and the US of deontology and utilitarianism, but a broader, substantive ethics. I quote Maldonado-Torres:

³⁴ Drawing rich lessons from her work in Southern Philippines, Castillo (2015) offers an approach embedded with reflexivity that researchers can deploy when facing dilemmas similar to what I have outlined above.

In face of the entire arrangement of modernity/coloniality, Fanon's cure of the colonised, but also of psychology, psychiatry, and the human sciences involves, not the application of specific methods, nor the understanding of tradition, but the cultivation of a decolonial attitude, which is profoundly epistemological as well as ethical, political, and aesthetic.³⁵

It is an ethics that is self-reflexive, always conscious of and struggling against remnants of colonial tendencies in our psyches. That guides us to be brave as we risk the loss of our projects or promotions, because we insist on questioning dominant and oftentimes official definitions of what is good, true and valid. Our response to the sacred canon of neutrality is precisely to do activist scholarship, but we cannot use activism to excuse sloppiness, for this, whether in the colonial or decolonial mould, would be wrong. We must hold ourselves to high landmarks of truthfulness, rigour and ethical vigour.

The decolonial ethics I am thinking of is captured in Fanon's words: "Have I not, because of what I have done or failed to do, contributed to an impoverishment of human reality?"³⁶ Because decolonial scholarship is liberatory scholarship, we then need to construct liberatory ethics that underpin our effort to liberate ourselves from captive consciousness and ways of doing and of being, as we take part in the larger effort of building a more just and kinder world. Our guiding question is: for whom and for what are our strivings? And to this, my response is also my discovery: that in the twists and turns, complexity and confusion of my intellectual journey, I found my mooring by taking part in the struggle of the people for liberation. The scholarship I have affinity with and am working for is necessarily insurgent.

Solidarity-building within the university, with the people, with other workers, across sectors, identities, across national borders, is the strategic response to globalised coloniality that was set up, maintained and invigorated by the global system of imperialism. International solidarity movements around the environment, workers' rights, indigenous peoples and human rights are gaining ground. We place our scholarship in the service of these movements and unite with them.

Reflections, Discernment

While participating in the people's struggle helped me find my mooring, I also now recognise the value of reflection and discernment in seeing my way through

³⁵ Maldonado-Torres 2017, 439.

³⁶ Fanon 1964, 3.

a little more clearly, for sometimes the road cannot be easily seen. These reflections are in many ways spontaneous, such as when years later, suddenly, in a bus stalled in traffic, I remembered the CSW project. Or the Bajau, when I prepared for a lecture on critical qualitative research methods and ethics. Mainly via spontaneous moments of discernment. Not via structured, methodical, scheduled reflections.

Reflexivity, I came to know, becomes a habit, an integral component of thinking, and gets honed to some finer essence by sparks of conscientious remembrances, but always starts from a basic sense of fairness, dignity and kindness that I had formed from diverse sources and influences in my childhood and in people's history. This sense of fairness has somehow become a part of my view of the world and my reflexiveness.

Perhaps my mentality is less vague, confused and conflicted today than it was decades ago, which of course should be the case for scholars who learn from experience, practice and mistakes, who are willing to be educated outside of the university, in struggle with the oppressed. Decolonial scholarship has many sources of knowledge, methods, techniques, tools, wisdom, both subaltern and mainstream. We don't have to invent, mostly. Rich materials have been developed in feminist pedagogy, critical studies, indigenous studies, and by decolonial scholars. What is needed, perhaps, is more imagination; more praxis.

I end with some lines from my reaction to Maldonado-Torres' keynote lecture during the 6th International Conference on Community Psychology in 2016 in Durban, South Africa:

We must be decisive in constructing insurgent scholarship that is truthful, brave, imaginative, and idealistic. Idealism is mocked today as foolishness of dreamers, privileging instead practicality. When we peel away its wrappings, the notion of practicality is intended to stop any fundamental changes to the global system of coloniality and its exploitative economic structural arrangements. We must insist on our ideals and draw inspiration from the suffering of people. More than ever, consciousness is a crucial arena of struggle for liberation. This is our arena. We need to first decolonise our own consciousness to produce liberatory knowledge to support workers, peasants, students, the urban poor, and indigenous peoples to construct a more humane world. Some of us in academia have reproduced myths for domination, while others are trying to produce knowledge in struggle with the people.³⁷

³⁷ Alvarez-Castillo 2017, 446–47.

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Hala Kamal

Feminist Research and Civil Society Engagement as Scholactivism

The Case of the Women and Memory Forum in Egypt

Introduction

Feminism as an ideology and social movement can be traced back to Egypt at the turn of the 20th century with the rise in women's awareness of the potential for their developing roles in the public sphere. This can be attributed to the general national awakening manifested in the social reform and national independence project, which included both men and women in the vision of the Egyptian *nahda*. It was the late 19th and early 20th century that witnessed the marked visible and vocal emergence of women in the public sphere, where they developed and practiced what we can call today their activism tools and skills. This 'women's awakening' can be traced in the following areas: the establishment and management of charity organisations; the establishment and management of, and intellectual contributions to, the press; the formation of women's pressure groups working towards decreasing if not eradicating sociocultural and legal discrimination against women, especially through an expansion in the education of women and a reform of laws.¹ The history of the Egyptian feminist movement, hence, can be seen as having developed from within the Egyptian socio-political context, while at the same time seeking solidarity with the women's movement worldwide. I have argued elsewhere² that the Egyptian feminist movement has, from its inception, used the tools of political activism; thus identifying and asserting itself as a social as well as a political movement that can be structured in four waves, based on the main issues raised along the years, addressing not only society, but, most notably, the authorities. By these waves, I mean the organised efforts initiated and followed through by Egyptian women towards socio-political change in the area of women's education, family law, political participation, and women's rights in both the private and public spheres. These included demanding equal educational opportunities; reforms of personal status and family laws; illumination of discrimination against women in work, political representation, and the

1 Baron 1994.

2 Kamal 2016.

public sphere; calling for laws criminalising sexual harassment and domestic violence; and the assertion of women's reproductive rights as well as the protection and their control of their bodies; and beyond.

Throughout these four waves, the start of which can be traced back to the turn of the 20th century, Egyptian women have combined feminist thought with activism. Throughout its history, the Egyptian feminist movement was characterised by theorising and organising; whereby women exposed gender discrimination through writing, publishing, and lecturing; while other women acted on the ground by campaigning, establishing organisations, and planning demonstrations. These two groups were grounded in the shared articulation of their visions in feminist statements addressing the public as well as concrete demands submitted to political parties, the parliaments, and the authorities. Another prominent feature of the Egyptian feminist movement is its continuity, as a quick look at the demands raised by Egyptian women throughout the 20th and into the 21st century clearly indicates that the movement has been raising more or less and developing the same demands across decades and generations. For example, the turn-of-the-20th-century demand to provide women with equal educational opportunities as those enjoyed by men has continued to occupy the agendas of feminists today, who continue to demand equal educational opportunities for women, ranging from making national school education compulsory for both girls and boys, to calls for providing women with access to knowledge on the basis of gender equality and justice. The generation and dissemination of knowledge has become among the most visible and vocal aims of the Egyptian feminist movement in the past few decades – a feminist knowledge that is essentially about women, by women, for women. It is a knowledge that enlightens and empowers; a knowledge that not only exposes injustice, but envisions social change; a knowledge that is informed by feminist theory and grounded in feminist practice.

This discussion paper seeks to highlight feminist knowledge production as scholactivism through a case study of the Women and Memory Forum, pointing out the interweaving of scholarship with activism, and addressing the main achievements worth celebrating and the challenges that continue to face feminist scholarship and activism. The paper will consider the role of academia in feminist scholarship, and the location of feminism within Egyptian civil society. Written from a position within WMF, this paper will reflect on questions related to how WMF perceives itself as part of the continuum of the Egyptian feminist movement. It will also highlight the issues raised within the organization about feminism, scholarship, ideology, and social engagement. Finally, in this discussion, I attempt to formulate a narrative about WMF's contribution to feminist research methods and women's empowerment in the Egyptian context – to feminist knowledge and activism

Feminist Knowledge Production

The location of feminist knowledge production in the Egyptian context and its transformative potential is different from the Western one, especially in the Anglophone world, where the earliest spaces created for feminist interventions are attributed to the rise of Women's Studies in Western academia. It was the establishment of Women's Studies, mostly on US-American university and college campuses, that provided an extension of women's political organising and an effective location for the development of scholarship and feminist consciousness-raising. Women's Studies emerged as an interdisciplinary area for feminism across the disciplines, whereby scholars developed research and teaching strategies: "to continue their ground-breaking research and criticism, challenging the androcentric paradigms that ratify the erasure of women, and to incorporate basic feminist scholarship within traditional fields of knowledge."³ In other words, feminist scholars aiming at transforming the canon adopted reformist and revolutionary tactics, by inserting feminist/gender perspectives within existing methodologies, or by creating their subversive or parallel spaces of scholarship and knowledge. A very clear example can be found, for example, within the disciplines of history and literary criticism, among many others, where some feminist scholars have chosen to use interdisciplinary feminist approaches and the gender lens within the established disciplines, or have opted to establish separate parallel disciplines such as herstory⁴ and gynocriticism⁵.

In the Egyptian context, similar feminist knowledge-production efforts can be attributed to individual scholars, publishing mostly in Anglo-American academic journals and/or working mostly from within civil society organisations in addition to their university affiliations. This can be seen as an outcome of the traditional disciplinary structure of Egyptian academia (unlike the liberal arts and interdisciplinary academic programme structure), as well as the absence of feminist and gender academic research centres in Egyptian universities. On the other hand, many feminist and human-rights organisations developing in Egypt since the 1990s have sought to ground their researchers in feminist research methods; hence the need for the production of feminist knowledge in Arabic. It is in such a sociocultural milieu that the Women and Memory Forum was established in Egypt (in 1995), conceptualised by feminist scholar Hoda Elsadda, who together with a group of feminist academics and activists started a project on re-reading

³ Aiken et al. 1988, xiv.

⁴ Morgan 1970.

⁵ Showalter 1979.

and re-writing Egyptian and Arab cultural history from a feminist perspective. This includes research into the history of Egyptian women's contribution to the *nahda* project (the Egyptian early-20th-century political and cultural renaissance in which the national liberation movement to end British colonization was combined with a general modern nation-building project); the search and recovery of women's roles in medieval history in the Islamic world; representations of women in popular culture; and the documentation of women's oral history in the WMF archive of women's voices, among others.

Gradually, at the beginning of the new millennium, from a critique of the historical and literary canon, the WMF raised the motto 'Towards Alternative Knowledge,' asserting the organisation's vision of scholarly engagement for social change. I have argued elsewhere that scholactivism can aptly describe the feminist translation project conceptualised and realised by the WMF.⁶ This paper, however, seeks to expand on the discussion about feminist translation, moving into the wider arena of WMF projects, and situate the work of the organization, its projects, and its team, within the notion of scholactivism. The discussion below will hence focus on three main aspects of WMF work: knowledge-production and documentation projects, gender education activities, and various publications. These knowledge-production and dissemination projects are explored within the wider framework of feminist knowledge-production, with particular focus on the intersections of feminism, scholarship, and activism. In other words, feminist praxis as scholactivism.

Scholactivism

Scholactivism is a term that was first used by environmentalist scholars who aimed at expanding the knowledge produced in academia about environmental change through its implementation in society. In 2016, environmentalist Rebecca Farnum observed the rise of "a movement of scholar-activists" raising questions about the engagement of academia in social change and "the role of individual academics in public life;"⁷ in other words, the relationship between knowledge-production and its implementation. In her definition, Farnum describes scholactivism as a term combining scholarship with activism, marking a significant development from traditional distinctions between scholars, policymakers, and

⁶ Kamal 2021.

⁷ Farnum 2016.

activists. At the core of her discussion lie the following questions: “Should scientists have a stake in their research? How should researchers share their knowledge? Should intellectuals engage with the public?”⁸ Farnum’s answers do not affirm the roles of academics and intellectuals in society, but further differentiate scholactivists from public intellectuals who “offer commentary on society” and engage with society through making knowledge accessible, unlike scholactivists who work closely with their communities and “believe they have a role to play in creating social justice.”⁹ The concrete model of scholactivism presented in Farnum’s brief article is explained via the example of the Dorm Room Diplomacy (DRD) project, established at the University of Pennsylvania in 2009, involving the creation of communication tools between American and Middle Eastern students through online video meetings. The purpose of these cross-cultural transnational interactions is to shape the views of young people through access to “positive knowledge about the ‘other’ to counter reductionist stereotypes.”¹⁰ Farnum’s questions, implied answers, and description of this experience led to several observations concerning the relationship between scholarship and activism. In the case of the DRD project, scholactivism is located within American academia, and addresses an academic community bound to leave academia and engage in society as individuals rather than a community as a whole. The role of scholars as activists is limited here to university student bodies, without indication of further policymaking towards systematic social change. In other words, it seems to rely on awareness-raising rather than social organising.

When importing the concept of scholactivism to the Egyptian context in relation to feminist activism, one of the main questions that arises has to do with its location. As pointed out in the introduction to this paper, Egyptian feminism emerged and developed in the public sphere rather than in the ivory tower of Egyptian academia. Actually, the university has always played the role of receiver rather than creator of feminist knowledge. Even in the earliest years of the Egyptian University (currently Cairo University, founded in 1908), the Women’s Section created in 1909 by Egyptian feminist intellectuals (prevented at that time from entering academia), managed to survive for just a few years before being closed down, blocking women from higher education till the mid-1920s. This can be only seen as an outcome of early-20th-century Egyptian civil-society activism, represented by such organisations as the Egyptian Feminist Union, the pressure groups working for women’s rights in the constitution and the law, in addi-

8 Farnum 2016.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

tion to the role of women in political parties and the women's press in general. Still, although the Egyptian feminist movement continued its struggle along the decades of the 20th century, feminist knowledge was not produced in academia until the early 21st century, and mainly through the efforts of Egyptian feminist academics who only found space for their feminist knowledge production within civil society organisations rather than university departments or academic programmes. These academics have only been able to introduce feminism into academia through their individual courses, whereas the first women's and gender studies postgraduate programme was established at the American University in Cairo, while the other only programme in an Egyptian university is the Women and Development MA programme in the Faculty of Political Science at Cairo University. This was, in turn, conceptualised in cooperation with Egyptian feminist academics working in university while developing feminist knowledge since the 1990s within feminist non-governmental organisations. It is only a few years ago that Gender Studies has been recognised as an academic specialization in the Faculty of Arts of Cairo University – the only Egyptian university acknowledging gender studies as such.

Hence, the main difference between the two examples of the University of Pennsylvania and Cairo University vis-à-vis the rise and development of scholactivism at the intersection of scholarship and activism, the academy and society, can be identified in the location of scholactivism. The Pennsylvania model suggests the location within academia, while the Cairo University model reveals the location of scholactivism within civil society and its direction from feminist organisations into academia. Egyptian scholactivism was developed by feminist scholars outside the groves of academia; although it continued to address scholars, activists, and the public. Through their location within academia and the civil society at the same time, Egyptian feminist scholactivists used their academic training to produce knowledge for social change. This is particularly applicable to the Women and Memory Forum in Egypt (WMF), which is an official NGO and an active feminist research and documentation centre concerned with the production and dissemination of knowledge about Egyptian (and Arab) women in history and society. The process of production can be seen as closely related to the scholarly dimension of WMF research, while the dissemination of this knowledge pertains to the activist sphere in its direct engagement with society and authority/-ies (i.e. societal powers – be it in terms of tangible institutions or via moral codes and norms).

The Case of the Women and Memory Forum

Unlike the Western model, where feminist scholarship developed within academia, the situation took the reverse form in the Egyptian context. It is within the civil society that most of the research and knowledge about women has been produced, and particularly within feminist non-governmental organisations and independent research centres. The WMF was established in 1995 (the decade that witnessed the establishment of several feminist and human-rights organisations) by a group of feminist academics who sought to conduct research on the representation of women in cultural history and the contributions of women in the public sphere.

The WMF is a unique feminist organization in the Egyptian context. It was founded by women scholars and activists trained in the humanities and social sciences, who have been working, since the mid-1990s, on a revision of Arab cultural history, with a particular focus on women's roles and representations. WMF has played an effective role locally and regionally, through its publications in Arabic (all available free online) which address both an academic and general readership; as well as organising gender education and women's oral history workshops (since 2010). The latest of these was held in May 2022, at the *Elles* Bookshop and Workspace in Cairo, attended by a group of young feminists, activists, and researchers (men and women). WMF has also been active within the Egyptian feminist movement, comprising feminist organisations advocating women's rights, and campaigning for reforms in personal status and family laws. The latest example is the *Wilaya* Campaign (concerning women's authority in the domestic and private sphere). WMF is currently involved in the Egyptian feminist campaign propagating reforms in Egyptian Personal Status and Family Law. The originality of WMF as a feminist organization is that it combines both academic scholarship with feminist activism, as the majority of the WMF founders and Board members are academics in the humanities and social sciences affiliated to Cairo University and The American University in Cairo.

The projects have varied across the years, but have maintained the vision of WMF since its inception: feminist knowledge production for social change. This is stated clearly in the "About Us" section of the WMF website: "We believe that one of the main obstacles facing Arab women now is the scarcity of alternative cultural information and knowledge about the role of women in history and in contemporary society."¹¹ The website also lists the main projects implemented by the organization, which include the following: Remembering; Who Is She in Egypt?;

¹¹ Women and Memory Forum "About Us," accessed May 15, 2022.

Archive of Women's Oral History; Gender Education Programmes; Library; Translating Gender; in addition to the numerous publications. Looking at the WMF work from the perspective of scholactivism, this discussion paper will focus on three dimensions: knowledge production, gender education, and feminist activism. I will, therefore, highlight a selection of projects and products that stand as manifestations of WMF scholactivism: the Oral History Archive; the Gender Education Programmes; and WMF Publications.

The Archive of Women's Voices

The Oral History Archive is the product of a long process of feminist scholarship. It involves three aspects of scholarship related to the concepts and methods of feminist historiography, documentation, and archiving. The project is based on interviewing groups of women who have played active roles in the public sphere; it started in the 1990s targeting women in education, women in the arts, and women in politics. Hoda Elsadda, founder of the archive of women's narratives in the WMF asserts the importance of a women's archive, stating that "[w]riting women's stories, recording women's memories and unearthing women's hidden knowledge production [...] have all contributed to a revisionist movement in recording various histories and cultural traditions."¹² She further emphasises the feminist dimension of the whole process being governed by "a framework of feminist knowledge production" informed by a feminist awareness of power relations and the aim of producing alternative discourses about women's roles in the public sphere.¹³

Maissan Hassan and Diana Magdy, two active researchers in the WMF women's archive, have explained the philosophy and history of the documentation of women's narratives as a feminist research project with a socio-political agenda:

Believing in the potential of documenting women's narratives to enhance the lived realities of women in contemporary societies, WMF initiated its first oral history project in the late 1990s. The Archive of Women's Oral History consists of several collections, such as the Women Pioneers Collection, which includes more than 100 narratives of pioneering women in various walks of life such as social work, art, and politics, and the Women in the Public Sphere Post-2011 Collection.¹⁴

¹² Elsadda 2016, 152.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁴ Hassan and Magdy 2018, 136.

This explanation highlights the activist dimension of the documentation of women's stories with the aim of providing concrete detailed examples of women's roles in the public sphere and hence questioning the cultural stereotyping of women's professional and public contributions to their societies, without limiting their roles to the domestic sphere. It is worth noting, however, that this process is closely connected to scholarly work, in the conceptualization of the whole project as well as in the structure and implementation of the documentation itself.

The oral history project is structured around the research involved in identifying women whose personal narratives would lead to the development of a historical narrative, which in turn requires understanding the sociocultural context in which these women lived and worked. This is then followed by a stage wherein the interview itself is structured and questions developed. These scholarly efforts are reflected in the formulation of questions (from a feminist perspective) in semi-structured interviews that do not rely on a fixed list of closed questions, but rather topics and prompts that trigger the interviewees' memories and reflections. The interviews themselves are conducted by a group of researchers who either have a theoretically-grounded experience in feminist interviewing, or receive a training in that area, conducted by WMF experienced researchers. The outcome of these interviews then undergoes careful editing, revision, and archiving; and selected interviews have been published online.¹⁵ In some cases, WMF has managed to obtain some personal documents, which are additionally organised and saved in the archive of Private Collections and Personal Papers. The scholarship behind the archiving is emphasised by Elsadda, who points out the epistemological framework of the process, which involves the narrator and the archivist:

Archivists are not the sole mediators of narratives of the self. Stories told by narrators are structured and shaped by the context of narration: the specific historical moment at which the narrative is recorded; the wider metanarrative to which the narrator subscribes or supports; the position the narrator chooses to occupy, be it consciously or unconsciously, within the metanarrative.¹⁶

The narrative itself is seen as a product of mediation, selection, and interpretation, influenced by such factors as the narrator's state of mind, memory, and the context of the interview itself.¹⁷ The role of the interviewer is also significant

¹⁵ Oral History Archive "Narrators," accessed May 15, 2022.

¹⁶ Elsadda 2016, 156.

¹⁷ See Elsadda 2016.

in their management of the interview itself. Sharlene Hesse-Biber argues for “reflexivity” as an essential part of the interviewing process, which enables the researcher/interviewer to be “mindful of his or her positionality and that of the respondent.”¹⁸ Similarly, Patricia Lina Leavy states that “[f]eminists often use oral history as a way of gaining rich qualitative data” from underrepresented social groups (such as women), and is used as “a tool for accessing silenced or excluded knowledge, for unearthing this ‘missing’ knowledge.”¹⁹ The documentation and archiving involve the transcription and editing of the interviews, which might take the form of “[e]ditorial interventions [...] to facilitate the text’s readability” in addition to supplementing some historical or factual information that might not be known to the readers.²⁰ These technical, theoretical, and epistemological concerns and guidelines lie at the core of the WMF oral history interviewing and archiving practice.

In their discussion of the WMF interviewing process, Hassan and Magdy highlight the importance of being informed by feminist research methods when planning and doing oral history interviews, not only when selecting the narrators, designing the interviews, and conducting them, but they also stress the importance of the researchers’ reflections on their interviews and narrators:

In order to encourage reflexivity among members of the research team working on the Women in the Public Sphere Post-2011 Collection, researchers were asked to write field notes and share them during the weekly team meetings. These meetings provided a space for discussion, reflection, and learning. The researchers reflected on biases and areas of discomfort that arose during the interviews. Team members regularly shared excerpts from the recorded narratives during the meetings. Most importantly, the researchers not only discussed the recorded interview but also shared reflections on the encounter with the narrators.²¹

This methodology, developed by the WMF oral history project, is informed by interviewing techniques and feminist oral history,²² offers a scholactivist model, where interviews represent feminist praxis, in the sense of being a process of feminist oral history documentation grounded in feminist research theory. In that regard, the WMF archive of women’s narratives is grounded in feminist scholarship, while the actual interviewing practice leads to the production of feminist knowledge. The activism, however, does not stop at the stage of producing this

¹⁸ Hesse-Biber 2013, 117.

¹⁹ Leavy 2013, 154.

²⁰ Elsadda 2016, 157.

²¹ Hassan and Magdy 2018, 140.

²² Anderson and Jack 1991; Hesse-Biber 2013.

kind of knowledge with the purpose of subverting stereotypes of women's roles in the public sphere, nor archiving it at WMF. It moves beyond its institutional boundaries by offering training in feminist oral history methods to young scholars and activists, at the Egyptian and regional level, through the WMF Gender Education project.

Gender Education: Feminist History, Concepts, Research Methods

Gender Education is another important component of WMF work under the broad title 'Educational Lectures in Gender Studies.' This takes the form of intensive short courses in areas of gender approaches across the disciplines, feminist research methods, and the history of the Egyptian women's movement. In addition to concrete trainings that are designed specifically for researchers involved in WMF projects, these courses and workshops aim to achieve the following goals: (1) To provide "a good level of knowledge of the intellectual history of gender studies and the foundational texts of gender theory in a number of fields"; (2) To enable emerging researchers to "familiarise themselves well with the range of theoretical approaches to the study of gender which construct the field of gender studies" and "critically appraise and read research in gender studies; (3) To "acquire awareness of the comparative, historical and biographical approaches to research on gender" and develop the ability to "formulate research questions and operationalise them in order to develop a research argument."²³

The project started in 2009 as a series of workshops organised in cooperation with Cairo University, with the purpose of introducing Gender Studies to postgraduate students in the humanities and social sciences at the faculties of Arts, Political Science, and Media Studies. The programme was also organised in cooperation with the University of Alexandria (2014), including participants from the Delta region, followed by another one at the University of Minia (2014) with participants from Upper Egypt, the University of Beni Soueif (2015), and in the Women's College at Ain Shams University in Cairo (2016). The idea of the gender education programme came to fill the gap in gender studies among young scholars and researchers affiliated to national universities and NGOs. The Egyptian academics in departments of English Language and Literature (specifically at Cairo University) were the first to gain knowledge of the developments in feminist theory and gender studies in Western academia through the areas of Literary and

²³ Women and Memory Forum "Gender Education Workshops," accessed May 15, 2022.

Critical Theory. Gender as a concept was additionally introduced in Egypt through international women's organisations, especially upon the UNDP Conference held in Cairo in 1994. It was through the involvement of the informed academics in the conference that feminist scholactivism was born. However, it became clear that big, organised efforts were necessary for the introduction of feminist thought and research methods, as well as gender as an analytical tool, in understanding and changing the social structures of gendered injustice. It was out of this sociocultural context that the Gender Education Programme developed at WMF.

A typical workshop is structured around two to three sessions a day along a week. (When organising regional workshops, the sessions were extended to two weeks.) The sessions take the form of interactive lectures followed by an open discussion. The workshops have titles which reflect the focus of each workshop, such as: Introduction to Gender and Feminism; Introduction to Feminist Research Methods; Oral History and Feminist Research; Reading Historical Documents. Consequently, lecturers are selected according to their areas of specialization, including sociologists and anthropologists, historians, as well as prominent feminist activists, in addition to sessions providing technological skills. WMF researchers comprise the core group of lecturers who design the programme, select the participants, and handle the selection of readings accompanying the workshop. General sessions are therefore included in each of the workshops, regardless of its specified area; these include the following: an introduction to key concepts in gender studies; an introduction to feminist research methods; and a brief history of the Egyptian feminist movement. The workshops are all conducted in Arabic, addressing mostly participants from Egyptian national universities and young researchers in feminist and human rights organisations. The most challenging aspect facing this programme, since its inception, has been the availability of reading materials in Arabic that correspond to the content of the programme.

In that regard, the earliest stages of designing and implementing the WMF Gender Education programme involved research to identify sources published in Arabic that could serve the reading lists of the programme. These included the following: (1) individual relevant books and articles by Egyptian scholars and writers throughout the 20th century; (2) the publications and grey literature available in Egyptian feminist organisations; (3) books on feminism and gender published by the National Translation Centre; and (4) relevant publications by the Egyptian National Council for Women. However, out of a realization of the lack of immediate accessibility to foundational readings in feminist theory and gender studies produced in English across the disciplines, the WMF Gender Education programme has in a way directed the focus of the WMF "Feminist Translations" project (further discussed in the next section). It was through these trans-

lations in the humanities and social sciences that the Gender Education could develop scholarly reading lists in Arabic, in addition to providing foundational as well as state-of-the-art readings in feminism and gender with the purpose of providing young scholars and activists with the latest trends in Western thought; and, hence, more importantly, encouraging them to engage with this knowledge from their positions and locations.

WMF Gender Education has always sought to connect scholarship with activism, through the readings, participants' affiliations, and with the aim of providing feminist knowledge as a source for further knowledge production, as well as an empowering tool to be used by civil society activists on the ground. WMF has therefore published two 'Documentary Manuals' in Arabic about *Documenting the Lives and Experiences of Women from a Gender Perspective* (2015) and *Educational Lectures in Gender Studies* (2016) which explain the processes, highlight the theoretical frameworks, and provide sample readings.²⁴ They are accessible online and can be used as training manuals for gender education and feminist oral historiography. It is worth repeating the idea that "WMF has focused on making alternative feminist knowledge available to researchers, activists, and gender equality advocates as well as to the general public. Linking specialised research and activism has been a persistent goal of WMF. In addition, WMF has actively explored new forms and venues for the dissemination of specialised research to wider audiences."²⁵ Thus, the Gender Education programme has been closely involved in producing knowledge and making it available to wide ranges of researchers and scholars within and beyond academia.

WMF Publications

WMF publications cover a wide range of genres, including conference proceedings, new editions of out-of-print publications authored by pioneers of the Egyptian feminist movement since the late 19th century, research in Islamic feminism, translations of (Anglophone) feminist scholarship on women relevant to the Egyptian context, as well as research papers. In addition to these books, there are less scholarly materials (though all informed by feminism and gender studies), including a gender-awareness booklet, posters with images and words by prominent women across Egyptian history, pins, bookmarks, and tote bags. Apart from paper prints, all WMF publications are available open access on the WMF

²⁴ Women and Memory Forum "Publications," accessed May 15, 2022.

²⁵ Hassan and Magdy 2018, 135.

website, as an expression of the WMF belief in making knowledge about women available and accessible to scholars, activists, and the general public.²⁶ The following is a more detailed description of these publications and their scholactivist dimensions.

First, *conference papers, reprints, and first prints*: WMF published its first book, *Women's Time and Alternative Memory* (1998) as an outcome of the first regional conference organised by WMF in Cairo. This book initiated a series of publications based on papers presented during conferences throughout the years, where questions were raised about theoretical discussions concerning 'women's history,' with particular reference to Egyptian, Arab, and Islamic history. These conferences were accompanied by the publications of works by Egyptian feminist pioneers such as Malak Hifni Nassef (*Al-Nisa'iyyat* 1910, 1998); Nabawiya Mousa (*Tarikhi bi-qalami* 1999, the first and second editions undated but estimated to have been published in the 1940s to 1950s); and Aisha Taymour (*Mir'aat al-ta'ammul fil-umur* 1892, 2002). The purpose of these reprints is to revive the writings of these women whose books have been out of print for decades, and have disappeared from public memory; the texts have been preceded by introductions that situate the works and their authors within the contexts of feminism, history, and modernity. However, producing reprints of out-of-print feminist writings was not limited to publications directly related to the WMF conferences, but has also been extended to include Qadriyya Hussayn's *Shahirat al-nisa' fi al-'alam al-islami* (Famous Women of the Islamic World, 1924; 2004), and Hend Nofal's first women's magazine in Egypt *Al-Fatat* (1892–1893, 2007). In addition to reprints, WMF has published for the first time the personal narratives of Gamila Sabri (1887–1962), an activist in the national Egyptian women's movement whose notebooks, *Kurrasat Gamila Sabri* (Gamila Sabri's Notebooks, 2007), were written for family and friends without ever being published before. Similarly, WMF printed the first part of the memoirs of Hawwa Idris (1909–1988), who acted as secretary of the Egyptian Feminist Union for long years. The memoirs are archived in library of the American University in Cairo, and were published for the first time by WMF (*Ana wal-sharq* 2017).

Second, *Women's Voices*: Within the framework of documenting women's narratives, WMF has published two books based on interviews with contemporary Egyptian women who played pioneering active roles in the Egyptian society, with the purpose of highlighting their intellectual and professional achievements. The first of these is *Samha El-Kholy: al-thakira wal-tarikh* (2007), a book based on a long interview with Samha El-Kholy (1925–2006), an Egyptian

²⁶ Women and Memory Forum "Publications," accessed May 15, 2022.

musicologist who reached the position of Dean of the Egyptian Conservatoire (1972–1981) and President of the Egyptian Academy of Arts (1982–1985). Her narrative is presented in her own voice, describing her life, education, and achievements as a prominent figure in Egyptian public life who paved new terrains for Egyptian women. Another book is *Aswat wa asdaa'* (2007), which includes short biographies and extracts from interviews held with Egyptian women (born in the first half of the 20th century) who played significant professional roles in Egypt: Anisa Al-Hifni (pediatrician); Durriuaa Zaki (botanist and environmentalist); Zaynab 'Izzat (charity and social worker); Sawsan Gereis, who tells the story of the German school in the 1950s and into the early 1960s (*Deutsche Schule der Borromäerinnen* Alexandria – DSBA); Fadila Tawfiq (the well-known radio presenter since the establishment of the Egyptian Radio Broadcasting Service in 1960 and into the new millennium); Layla Barakat (who tells her story as a charity worker continuing the tradition of charity work among upper-middle class women as represented by her mother); Nazli Qabil (nurse and recipient of the Florence Nightingale Award); and Ni'mat Abul-Su'ud (first Egyptian certified midwife). These achievements and contributions are published with the purpose of celebrating these Egyptian pioneers, inserting them into the history of Egyptian women, and providing younger generations with role models that dismiss stereotypes of femininity and domesticity.

Third, *Memory Papers*: Another valuable series is the “Awraq al-zakira” (“Memory Papers”), which includes individual papers in the form of monographs focusing on one specific issue. The first two of the series were written jointly by Omaira Abou-bakr and Hoda El-Saadi focusing on medieval history: “Al-nisa' wa mihnat al-tibb fi al-mujtama'at al-islamiya” (Women and the Medical Profession in Muslim Societies, 1999); “Al-mar'a wa al-hayat al-diniya fi al-usur al-wusta bayn al-islam wa al-gharb” (Women and Religious Life in the Middle Ages between Islam and the West, 2001); the third was entitled “Al-junun wal-mar'a fi misr nihayat al-qarn al-tasi' 'ashar” (Madness and Women in Egypt at the End of the Nineteenth Century, 2004) which included two papers about the same topic: Hoda El-Saadi's “The Change in the Concept of Madness and its Effect on Women and Society in Egypt at the End of the Nineteenth Century,” and Ramadan El-Kholy's “Women and Madnees in the Nineteenth Century.” This was followed by “Al-nashat al-iqtisadi al-hadari lil-nisa' fi misr al-islamiya” (Economic Urban Activities by Women in Islamic Egypt, 2007). The last of the series is “Lamahat min matalib al-haraka al-niswiya al-misriya 'abr tarikhaha,” a shorter English version

of which was published as “A Century of Egyptian Women’s Demands: The Four Waves of the Egyptian Feminist Movement.”²⁷

Fourth, the *Feminist Translation Series*: The “Feminist Translation” series has developed out of a realization of the scarcity of knowledge in Arabic about feminism and gender across the disciplines. As a translation project, it is grounded in Feminist Translation Theory about works translated by women, about women, and for women. The series includes seven books in various areas, each edited by a specialist who selected the articles for translation, with the aim of rendering in Arabic foundational articles and state-of-the-art-research done in the Anglophone world about feminist and gender studies. The translators were also very carefully chosen based on their specialization rather than mere professional experience. The acts of translation were accompanied by a workshop involving all the editors and translators involved in the project to discuss problematic and controversial issues related to the translation of gender-related terminology. The target group has included both postgraduate students in the humanities and social sciences at Egyptian national universities, as well as researchers working in feminist and human rights organisations. The following is a list of the books published in this series: *Nahwa dirasat al-naw’ fi al-ulum al-siyasiya* (Towards Studying Gender in Political Science, 2010); *Al-niswiya wal-dirasat al-diniya* (Feminism and Religious Studies, 2012); *Al-niswiya wal-dirasat al-tarikhia* (Feminism and Historical Studies, 2015); *Dirasat al-naw’ fi al-ulum al-ijtima’iya* (Gender and the Social Sciences, 2015); *Al-naqd al-adabi al-niswi* (Feminist Literary Criticism, 2015); *Al-nisa’ wa al-tahlil al-nafsi* (Women and Psychoanalysis, 2016); and *Al-niswiya wal-jinsaniya* (Feminism and Sexuality, 2016). I have elsewhere explained and discussed this project as an example of scholactivism.²⁸

Fifth, In *Words and Images Series*: Unlike most of the publications above, which carry more of a scholarly than activist content, addressing mainly young scholars and researchers, the series of illustrated books *Fi suture wa suwar* (In words and images) has been designed with the purpose of presenting knowledge about women, feminism, and gender in an educational and accessible format. The first book in the series, *Madkhal ila qadaya al-mar’a fi sutur wa suwar* (An Introduction to Women’s Issues in Words and Images, 2002), was the outcome of a collaborative effort of the WMF founders and a core group of researchers, aiming to introduce a general Arab readership to feminism and gender studies through textual descriptions, anecdotes, documentary materials, cartoons, and illustrations. In this regard, it covers various topics, such as women’s education,

²⁷ Kamal 2016.

²⁸ Kamal 2021.

women and the laws, gender equality, the history of women's movements, and cultural stereotyping, among many other areas. The same philosophy and form informed the following volumes, although each addressed a specific topic: *Al-awqaf fi suture wa suwar* (Charity Endowments in Words and Images, 2006), and *Ra'idat al-fann al-misri fi suture wa suwar* (Women Pioneers in Egyptian Art in Words and Images, 2008). The latest in this series is the book about *Bina' wa nidal: min arshif al-haraka al-niswiya al-misriya* (Construction and Struggle: from the Archive of the Egyptian Feminist Movement, 2019) which highlights the roles of women's organisations and the most significant feminist struggles in Egyptian history.

Sixth, *Feminist Stories and Fairy Tales*: One of the earliest projects in WMF was the re-reading and re-writing of fairy tales and *The Arabian Nights* from a feminist perspective. It had started as an exercise in feminist literary praxis in the sense of critiquing the dominant stereotypes of femininity and masculinity in fairy tales, and producing alternative representations in adapted texts. The project that started in the form of regular reading and writing workshops, and developed into public storytelling events, led to the publication of *Qalat al-rawiya* (*Her Tale* 1999) in which the editor (and project initiator Hala Kamal) explained the theoretical frame of writing stories from women's perspective; described the process through which the feminist texts were developed; and offered samples of the new stories and fairy tales that were written during the workshops; followed by an appendix with the source texts. The reading and writing workshops continued for over five years, leading to the publication of a collection of stories (*Hikayaat Huriya* 2003) all written by one of the participants in the workshop (Soha Raafat) centred around the stories of one protagonist Huriya. Another outcome of the group discussions and writing workshops was the collaborative collection based on the imaginative idea of Shahrazad's untold stories in *The Arabian Nights*, published under the title *Qalat al-rawiyaat ma lam taqulhu Shahrazad* (2007). In addition to these texts, which address an adult readership/audience, several stories and collections were developed during the workshops as children's stories: *Sitt el-shottar* (The Smartest Girl 2002); *Al-ayyam al-sab'a lil-shatter wel-shattra* (The Seven-Day Adventure of the Smart Boy and the Smart Girl, 2002); *Misbah Ala'eddin* (Aladdin Lantern 2002); and *Hikayat Farida* (Farida's Stories, 2007). In 2019, Mounira Soliman (a member of the WMF storytelling group) wrote about the project in retrospect, and pointed out its role in introducing the ideas of feminism and gender to the general public through the books and storytelling events, as well as

in initiating the feminist storytelling model, which has taken various dimensions over the years.²⁹

Seventh, *Posters, Pins, and Bookmarks*: Apart from the dissemination of feminist knowledge and thought through publications, workshops, and storytelling events, WMF has, in the wake of the Egyptian January 2011 Revolution, ventured into a new space with the aim of sending feminist messages through bookmarks, posters, stickers, and pins. Under the motto “Women Will Liberate Egypt,” the artist Heba Helmi created an artistic form for the WMF feminist messages. These include posters of prominent women of different generations, backgrounds, and varying fame: Amina Rachid, Doria Shafik, Genvieve Sidaros, Inji Efflatoun, Laila Doss, Latifa al-Zayyat, Lotfia El-Nadi, Marie Asaad, May Ziyada, Mona Mina, Nadia Lotfy, Qadriya Hussein, Rashka al-Ridi, Samira Ibrahim, Shahenda Maklad, Wedad Mitri, and Zainab al-Ghazali. All these posters included a picture of the woman, accompanied by one of her sayings, together with a biographical note; set against a faded background with the running motto “Women Will Liberate Egypt.” Some of these were further selected for pins, while the same motto was used with a series of stickers with sayings by Egyptian women carrying a political/feminist message. Furthermore, during the Egyptian 2011 Revolution, several graffiti murals in downtown Cairo carried images of women from ancient Egyptian times; these too were used, together with other graffiti images of rebellious and revolutionary women, as bookmark designs. Even these objects carry the two-fold features of scholactivism, as they rely on research into history, the selection of sayings to convey specific messages, as well as reaching out to the public and thus indirectly subverting unjust stereotyped representations of women by providing alternative images and messages.

Conclusion: Achievements and Challenges

In this discussion of scholactivism as represented by the mandate and work of the Women and Memory Forum in Egypt, feminist activism combines research with knowledge production and civil society engagement. As shown above, WMF has succeeded over the years (since its inception in 1995) in interweaving scholarship with activism, for which it deserves laudation as much as it struggles with challenges on its way towards achieving its vision. Through its core group and affiliated researchers, WMF has straddled the worlds of academia and civil society, situ-

²⁹ Soliman 2019.

ating itself at the intersection of feminism. As scholars and members of the WMF, we see it as a continuum of the history of Egyptian feminism and an active agent in its present scene, with its overlapping spaces of scholarship and activism. It is therefore crucial to reflect on the contributions of WMF to the Egyptian feminist movement from the position of knowledge production and dissemination.

Feminist scholars have discussed the challenges and achievements of women strictly within academic settings. Gesa Kirsch describes the established challenges facing women in academia to achieve the following: “The first goal is breaking traditional female norms [...]. The second goal is challenging traditional approaches to research scholarship, and teaching.”³⁰ If anything, these two goals, highlight the marginality and volatility of women’s (and particularly feminist women’s) position in academic institutions, as described earlier by Nadya Aisenberg and Mona Harrington in terms of “Outsiders in the Sacred Grove,” the subtitle of their book *Women in Academe* (1988). This outsider position is consequential to the “strong thread of resistance by women to academic conventions establishing the boundaries of knowledge” and their resort to interdisciplinarity.³¹ In their research the authors come to several conclusions as to the areas of academic specialization and potential advancement for most women in academia; namely in areas in which the social context is relevant to their research and where they can have transformative effects, leading to “a strong preoccupation with seeking social change through transformed consciousness.”³² It is not common in Western academia, however, for scholars to combine their academic affiliations with civil society organising. The familiar models involve either leaving academia for a commitment to civil society systematic activism, or practicing activism on university campuses.

In that regard, WMF offers a unique model in the Egyptian context of scholars who, while teaching at their universities, ventured into establishing an independent organisation in which they form the core group of researchers, and train a younger generation of researchers and assistants. It is also worth noting that interdisciplinarity is a key feature here as well, whereby professors of English and Comparative literature become leaders of research projects in history and archiving, in addition to their engagement with feminist and civil society committees, campaigns, and projects. It is definitely an achievement, yet it also creates an extremely challenging situation in which, at times, professional pressures and expectations at the university career level may interfere with the activist commit-

³⁰ Kirsch 1993, 3.

³¹ Aisenberg and Harrington 1988, 100.

³² *Ibid.*, 98.

ment; or the other way round, as commitment to activism may delay academic advancement – not to mention that it may threaten career advancement. In the Egyptian case, this becomes even more challenging due to the state interference in civil society organising, and repeated changes in the laws of association, which cause delays (if not extended halts) in the work of civil society organisations as witnessed specifically in the past few years. It is a general atmosphere of oscillation, whereby, practically-speaking, academics (with tenure) cannot easily take the decision of devoting all their time and efforts to civil society organisations.

In her article about the archive of women’s participation in the Egyptian 2011 revolution, Hoda Elsadda describes the archive as “An Archive of Hope” whereby it “tells a story of hope as it highlights the agency of women as political actors effecting change within their immediate circles as well as in the larger body politic.”³³ I wish, therefore, to conclude this paper by extending Elsadda’s words to refer to the whole Women and Memory Forum as an embodiment of feminist scholactivism and as a space of hope.

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33 Elsadda 2016, 149.

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Salim Hmimnat

Pragmatic Research, Critical Knowledge and Political Relevance

A Self-Reflexive Perspective

This article is a self-reflexive exercise that seeks to turn lived research experience into an object of exploration and critical self-evaluation. Here, the researcher moves from the position of observer to the object of observation. The mere thought of reflexivity might cause feelings of aversion and reluctance among many social science researchers. It demands the readiness and boldness to expose the messy practices that underlie, yet are intentionally hidden in, the research and writing process. Reflexivity, in this sense, serves as a mirror game in which the researcher goes behind closed doors to expose all moments of confusion, uncertainty, and fragility marking the confrontation with the intractable facts of field research. It deconstructs aspects of the knowledge production process by revealing the institutional conditions, ideological mechanisms, and dominant discourses shaping the academic enterprise.

This deliberate self-disclosure can generate feelings of anxiety and discomfort in the researcher. It remains, however, of crucial significance. Whilst the positivist approach often overemphasises objectivity over subjectivity, reflexivity – if undertaken thoughtfully and methodically – can only enhance qualitative research’s rigour, reliability, and credibility.

In practical terms, self-reflexivity draws on the idea that the researchers should tell their ‘research stories’ transparently, averting the ‘hypocritical’ feature¹ attributed to formal discourse and normative academic writing styles. Telling the research story entails exposing the different phases of the research undertaking, from its birth as an initial inquiry, passing through data collection, the negotiation of access to the field and positionalities, through to reporting research findings. This introspective investigation of the research process, although not devoid of what Bourdieu called “narcissistic indulgence” and “scholastic illusion,”² can yield an invaluable moment of productive reflection, especially if the researcher is self-aware and bold enough to uncover the

1 Bourdieu 2004, 25.

2 Ibid., 37, 89.

backstage and ‘messiness’ and ‘muddy swamp’ of research practice³ that often remains out of the reader’s view. Reflexive thinking, in this sense, imposes itself as a “hygienic exercise”⁴ that uncovers unconscious flaws, contradictions, and implicit biases between the researcher and the research object.⁵

This article adds to a growing literature that uses reflexivity as a crucial methodological means to evaluate qualitative research knowledge-production in the Moroccan context.⁶ Drawing on personal field research on Morocco’s transnational religious policy, the article argues that, in a Global South context such as Morocco, where social science research is still underdeveloped and fairly marginalised, the researcher needs to map out a context-sensitive research agenda suitably articulated with critical and cameral⁷ perspectives to generate usable knowledge for decision-makers and benefit the community. Regardless of its potential pitfalls, a rigorous calibration of critical depth with socio-political relevancy seems essential to endow the social sciences with the ‘performance legitimacy’ to root the research strongly in deliberative public space. Importantly, this calibration ensures the social sciences’ sustainable growth in the ongoing neoliberal transformation of academia in the Arab world today.⁸

To unfold this argument, the article first presents elements of Bourdieu’s reflexive approach that inform the study’s analytical framework. Second, it explores some key issues marking Morocco’s emerging political science research arena, namely the practice of field research, the power-knowledge nexus, and reflexivity. Thirdly, it tells the story of an individual case of policy research, demonstrating how the academic researcher, under the constraints of academic reality and the pressing quest for survival and professional development, is pushed to tread a fine pragmatic line between the critical and cameral perspective of social sciences.

3 Finlay 2002a.

4 Pascon 1986, 107.

5 See our co²libri project as example: <https://www.iaaw.hu-berlin.de/de/region/suedostasien/forschung/netzwerke/co2libri>.

6 Zaki 2006; Ward 2015; Mouna et al. 2017.

7 Cameralism, drawn from the German tradition of ‘Kameralstudien’ since the XVII century, marked the beginning of the academic development of the sciences of administration and government. By providing technical knowledge and practical expertise, it primarily aims at training an elite of public officers and state servants to counsel and help the king/prince to rule state affairs. For further insights into a “cameral” political science, see Association Française de Science Politique 2009.

8 See Hanafi and Arvanitis 2015; Waterbury 2020.

Reflexivity as a Critical Means of Knowledge Production: Elements of Bourdieu's In-Depth Reflexivity

In recent decades, reflexivity has attracted considerable interest as an “academic virtue”⁹ and essential ingredient of rigorous qualitative research production.¹⁰ Reflexivity turns the research experience into a fertile subject for critical investigation by casting an “ironic gaze [that] unveils, unmask[s], [and] brings to light what is hidden”¹¹ in our research experience. In contrast to the common view condemning all intrusions of self and subjectivity into the research process, including those hidden behind ‘critical distance’ or the Weberian principle of ‘axiological neutrality,’ reflexive thinking transforms subjectivity from a problem to an opportunity.¹² By shedding light on the methodological and experimental choices that characterise the lived research experience, reflexivity illuminates how the researcher’s social background, presuppositions, and behaviours influence the research process and shape its findings.¹³ This undertaking is not intended to diminish the credibility of social science research but rather to enhance its trustworthiness and even validate its outcomes.

Since the focus is on the researcher’s self and complex positionalities in the broad social field, reflexive practice is not without difficulties. It requires of the researcher a laborious “doubling of consciousness”¹⁴ to reveal the ambiguous, tense relationships between the research-explorer and the subject explored, and recursively go back and forth between the two. This complex introspection cannot be accomplished overnight. As Bourdieu maintains, it ought to be a slow, arduous process that can be mastered only by long apprenticeship and practice.¹⁵

Reflexive practice might be seen as a sort of ‘treason’ and disclosure of ‘professional secrets’ that risk calling into question the attractive representation that cultural producers often have of themselves as free from all kinds of social determinism.¹⁶ It thus requires critical commitment, self-awareness, and cons-

9 Lynch 2000.

10 Etherington 2004, 34; Berger 2015, 1.

11 Bourdieu 2004, 4.

12 Finlay 2012b.

13 Finlay and Gough 2008, IX.

14 Bourdieu 2003, 281.

15 Bourdieu 2004, 5.

16 Bourdieu 2003, 283.

tant epistemological vigilance.¹⁷ Importantly, ‘disclosing oneself’ and exposing all kinds of ideological biases and ethical dilemmas derived from the researcher’s position in the scientific field requires a great deal of audacity. Such subjective factors, which actually constitute the researcher’s microcosm, itself shaped by the overall social structure, inevitably influence the research experience and affect its outputs.

Reflexive analysis involves a twofold risk: slipping into narcissistic temptation¹⁸ or falling into the trap of “excessive self-analysis.”¹⁹ The latter may lead to endless deconstructive thinking, distracting the researcher and weakening their focus on the research itself. Thus, the reflexive exercise should be initially deferred while the researcher carefully documents all the elements needed to engage in it subsequently.

Bourdieu points to the significance of the substantial shift from a primitive conception of reflexivity, or what he called “narcissistic reflexivity” to an in-depth, “reformist” one.²⁰ Primitive reflexivity can be identified as a mere justificatory discourse to prove the scientific credentials of anthropological research. The early ‘reflexive moment’ in social sciences occurred in the 1970s and 1980s with a generation of anthropologists and ethnographers whose confessional accounts of their lived field experience²¹ emphasised particularly the subjective relationships between researchers and informants and other research participants.²² In-depth reflexivity, in contrast, refers to a more comprehensive and critical introspection that questions the researcher’s positionalities, biases, and the general structural conditions shaping the researcher’s microcosm.

Overall, the significance of Bourdieu’s reflexive approach lies in providing a comprehensive, radical program as a collective enterprise incumbent on all the agents in the field.²³ Bourdieu’s reflexive project is credited with being vigilant of the constitutive elements of knowledge production, including the unconscious subjective motives and cognitive biases involved in research practice. Bourdieu’s reflexive project goes so far as to investigate the researcher’s position and personal interests in the academic space, as well as the various historical and intellectual conditions, academic traditions, and the axiomatic problems of the national scientific field that altogether impact social knowledge-production.

¹⁷ Bourdieu 2004, 89.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Finlay 2002a, 212.

²⁰ Bourdieu 2004, 90–91.

²¹ Finlay 2002a.

²² See for instance, Rabinow 1977.

²³ Bourdieu 2004, 91.

Political Science, Reflexivity and Field Practice: Insights from Morocco

Political science knowledge production in Morocco has recorded a remarkable growth during the last three decades. The discipline has relentlessly pursued an understanding of the complex and deep transformations of the political regime since 1990s. The number of teaching units and students enrolled in the discipline has significantly increased.²⁴ An equivalent increase has been recorded in the number of university research structures, think tanks, and publications,²⁵ as well as the proliferation of sub-fields and specific research themes that captivate the attention of a growing number of specialised political scientists. Despite this relative growth, knowledge production in political science has barely been assessed. Apart from a few individual attempts,²⁶ there is hardly any fundamental review or comprehensive evaluation of the theoretical, epistemological, and methodological aspects of knowledge production or of future research directions in this emerging discipline.

Political science in Morocco does not seem to be involved in any ‘critical moment’ or state-of-the-art assessment of the discipline. Instead, this discipline is seemingly still going through accumulation and experimentation.²⁷ Such a situation is explained by the dispersion of knowledge production sites in the social sciences, as a whole, the prevalence of individual research,²⁸ and the inconsistent multilingual publication. Another significant explanation is that political science, like many other social sciences, suffers from the absence or weakness of a ‘scientific community’ that would institutionalise knowledge production in this disciplinary field and promote public debate about its major orientations and developments. As comparative experience teach us, scientific communities often emerge hand in hand with active professional associations.²⁹ An evaluative report issued by the Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education maintains that scientific

24 It is noteworthy that, in Moroccan public universities, political science is not taught as a separate discipline but rather as a mere sub-field within the department of Public Law, in ‘open access’ mode. Since the early 2000s, several private higher education establishments have begun to offer specialised BA and MA programs in Political Science. In 2018, Mohammed V University inaugurated a selection-based ‘*licence d’excellence en sciences politiques*,’ the first of its kind in the Moroccan public university system

25 Moudden 2013.

26 See Saaf 1991; Rachik 2007; Saaf 2011; Moudden 2013.

27 Saaf 1992, 137–36.

28 Rachik 2007.

29 Cherkaoui 2009, 54.

communities, in Moroccan context, are still in their “embryonic stage.”³⁰ Nearly 60% of university professors deny their existence.³¹ The Moroccan Political Science Association, deemed to represent the discipline in question, suffers from multiple dysfunctions and constraints. Despite the fact that general assemblies are regularly held, the association’s scientific activities remain seasonal, it lacks specialised journals, and significantly has not yet managed to attract a critical mass of scholars and practitioners. There is still a long way to go before the representative authority of political science can be established and fully recognised.

Such structural issues do not concern only Morocco. They are similarly raised in other regional contexts, showcasing the fragility of the national political economies of social science knowledge production in the Arab world compared to their counterparts in the Global North.³²

Concerning the discipline’s orientations and prospects, three central issues have captured the attention of Moroccan political scholars.

The first issue concerns the correlation between political knowledge and power and its theoretical and praxeological dimensions. The theoretical dimension questions the correlation between political knowledge and domination.³³ Morocco-related colonial (political) sociology, through its prominent representatives (Michaux Bellaire, Charles Le Coeur, Robert Montagne, and Jacques Berque), has frequently been presented as a pertinent example of such correlation.³⁴ Regardless of the circumstances and ideological tendencies surrounding the evolution of colonial knowledge, scholars have debated how this knowledge can promote emerging political sociology in the context of modern nation-state building in post-independent Morocco.³⁵ As for the praxeological and cameral dimensions, it questions in particular the inextricable relationship between political science and political action, namely how politicalology can prove its legitimacy as an applied-knowledge field concerned not only with deciphering contemporary socio-political reality, but also with the rationalisation of decision-making processes and political problem-solving.³⁶ Jean Leca pointed out that “there is always a part of the heritage of cameralism in the evolution of modern political science on a universal scale: its role is to help the prince to govern.”³⁷

30 Cherkaoui 2009, 53.

31 *Ibid.*, 19.

32 See Hanafi and Arvanitis 2015; Waterbury 2020.

33 Saaf 1992, 79.

34 For a detailed elaboration of this argument, See Khatibi 1967, 10–28; Saaf 1992, 83–115.

35 See for instance, Saaf 1992, 120–1.

36 Moudden 2013.

37 Cited in Association Française de Science Politique (AFSP) 2009, 97.

The second issue draws attention to the weak investment of field research practice in political science research in contrast to the excess of institutional-legal formalism that has long dominated Morocco's law faculties, where political science is predominantly taught. As Rachik put it, "We speak more easily of sociography and ethnography than of politography."³⁸ Several scholars demonstrate an increasing awareness and appreciation of the fieldwork as a 'training laboratory' that embodies the idea of 'learning by doing.' Yet, except for a few areas of research in which field practice flourishes greatly, such as public policy, electoral behaviour, and social protest movements, 'desktop research' continues to dominate political science research at the expense of field research. To intelligibly comprehend the socio-political and institutional reality, desktop research is preoccupied with descriptive and historical analysis or, at best, resorts to document-based analysis, especially in research areas pertaining to political history, political thought, and political Islam.³⁹ Field research, in contrast, privileges empirical tools and grounded theories. An emerging anchoring of field practice in Moroccan political science research has primarily been noticed in the Casablanca law faculty since the early 1980s. Thanks to Paul Pascon (a Moroccan sociologist) and Bruno Etienne (a French political scientist), social science seminars and research groups have sprung up since then, encouraging young political science scholars to engage more actively in field-based research.⁴⁰ This is a breakaway from the normative, institutional-legal perspective that has greatly marked Moroccan law faculties under the influence of the French university education model. A member of this core group, subsequently accredited with consolidating fieldwork approaches within Casablanca law faculty, contends that "in social sciences, learning the profession of researcher is not achieved through handbooks, but rather through field practice."⁴¹ This new dynamic has resulted in a growing young generation of political science scholars, more open to field research and social science techniques, in the attempt to shift away from the excessive focus on legalistic-institutional and state-centred approaches, deemed incapable of empirically apprehending socio-political reality.

The third issue points to the increasing interest in reflexive thinking as an introspective tool to gain insights into political science knowledge production. The vital need for reflexivity concerns academic research as well as expert consultation commanded by private or public agents. While the expertise and knowledge

³⁸ Rachik 2007, 57.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁰ Tozy 2014.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

of political scientists have been intensively required and invested in the political or ideological projects of state and civil actors, reflexivity should be carefully preserved and valued. Regardless of the private and public utility of research sponsored by the state or by other donors, Tozy recommends maintaining reflexive practice to enhance the ‘traceability’ and ‘transparency’ of research, detect conflicts of interests and ideological tendencies involved, and ensure that the research product can be subjected to accountability and critique.⁴²

Related to the three elements raised above, the following section proposes a self-reflection exercise on an individual case of field research. Despite its limited scope, this case study is being problematised to mirror the overall institutional conditions and theoretical issues that impact Morocco’s political science knowledge production. This tentative problematisation will also highlight some pragmatic strategies that help the researcher overcome field research’s constraints and successfully publish and disseminate research findings.

The Story of a Field Research

My field research was carried out intermittently between 2016 and 2020. It examined the intensive use of religion as a fundamental component of Moroccan-African policy during the last two decades at three levels: (1) the formation process of this transnational religious policy, the actors and stakeholders involved, and the mechanisms of its implementation; (2) the major geostrategic aims intended; and, (3) the reception and implications of this policy in the countries involved. Since the research touched on a complex matrix of ideological discourses and overlapping geopolitical interests, it was meant to be both exploratory and critical.

I started working on this topic immediately after joining the Institute of African Studies (IEA) in late 2011, yet my concerns with it predate this institutional affiliation. ‘Spiritual diplomacy’ was a partial theme of my doctoral project, defended in 2009, which focused on King Hassan II’s Moroccan religious policy from 1984 to 2002. I have subsequently sought to update the topic in light of the new contexts and stakes of King Mohammed VI’s Moroccan African policy. The idea of bringing up to date the topic was the keystone of my application for a research position at Mohammed V University in Rabat. Among the questions posed by the selecting committee members, one remains vivid in my mind: “What

⁴² Tozy 2014, 239.

would you suggest as a value-added contribution or a research project that makes you qualified for this position?” I proposed the African dimension of Moroccan religious policy as a relevant field of scholarly investigation. I also highlighted the dire need for field-based research in gaining a more multi-perspective and in-depth understanding of the topic. My successful application seemed to mean that a Moroccan university institute, specialised in promoting humanities and social science research on Africa, was interested in the proposed research. This interest is quite understandable, given that this research institution strives to engage in policy-oriented reflection and keep abreast of issues of concern to the official Moroccan vision in Africa. The IEA’s early scientific initiatives and activities were dominated by a historical orientation, yet the IEA subsequently increased its engagement in policy research on cutting-edge issues concerning Moroccan-African relations in all fields. Indeed, rapid developments in the Sahel region and West Africa following the dramatic collapse of Libyan and Malian regimes in 2011 and 2012, and the politico-religious initiatives and diplomatic moves Morocco took to handle these events,⁴³ seemingly provided an impetus to inscribe ‘Moroccan religious policy towards Africa’ into the IEA’s research agenda.

From a practical standpoint, developing this research project under the IEA’s umbrella was expected to fulfil, in principle, two main purposes. First, receiving institutional support to facilitate my field research, especially building a network of research participants within relevant government departments and official bodies. Second, obtaining funds for field research project to be carried out outside of Morocco.

Since the research touches on issues that intersect with discourses of hegemony, influence, and regional competition in mobilising religion to serve states’ national interests (*la raison d’état*, the ‘war on terror,’ etc.), the questions that primarily impose themselves here are: What sort of academic research knowledge is the researcher expected to produce? Is the academic knowledge produced to be of critical substance? Is it action research aimed at addressing specific applied (empirical) questions? Or is it meant to serve as apologetical knowledge, corroborating other mainstream discourses on state public policies?

In the same vein, to what extent can the researcher maintain intellectual autonomy as a producer of critical academic discourse about the state’s discourses of hegemony and its geopolitical aims? To more deeply explore this chain of critical inquiries, one can wonder whether the researcher runs the risk of being stigmatised as ‘politically incorrect,’ which can ultimately complicate the researcher’s

⁴³ Including the establishment of a training program for African imams and the creation of the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulema. See Hmimnat 2020.

positionality in the academic field, delay his professional promotion, and even impede the building of sustainable collaborative relations with research participants, many of whom are state elites and officials.

Such tricky questions about positionality and the academic researcher's presumed autonomy can be viewed from two opposite standpoints: on the one hand, there is the view favouring the researcher's full autonomy and a plea for a critical attitude in university-based academic knowledge. Intellectual autonomy is commonly seen a founding principle of academic practice, and it is within the university space that intellectual freedom and academic autonomy are preserved and enhanced.⁴⁴ On the other hand, the opposite view is that academic knowledge can be harnessed in service of political decision-makers. This cameralist view builds on the assumption that only the politician is able to grasp the complexities of the field reality and its constraints,⁴⁵ whereas the academician's knowledge is deemed abstract and 'too theoretical' to efficiently handle practical issues on the ground. "*On allait plus vite sans eux!*"⁴⁶ – this is how many state officials commonly assess the usefulness and relevance of university researchers' work. Regardless of whether this perception reflects a widespread opinion among state officials and decision-makers, the above-cited quote echoes to some extent the kind of unfavourable representation decision-makers have of university researchers in Moroccan context; that is, an image of a bunch of ineffectual academics sitting in their ivory towers, disconnected from what is happening on the ground. Indeed, the perception that members of contemporary society hold of academia and academicians greatly helps define the status, function, and development of scientific research within a country.⁴⁷

Research funding is an additional indicator that reveals cultural representations of social science research's worth in a given context. In Morocco, the budget allocated to the scientific research sector does not exceed 0.8% of the gross domestic product (GDP). It is obviously weak compared to international standards, which, for countries like the U.S. and some in Europe, amounts to 3% of GDP.⁴⁸ Moreover, in Morocco, the share dedicated to the humanities and social sciences (HSS), law and political sciences included, from the whole budget for

⁴⁴ Khatibi 1997, 171; Aït Mous and Ksikes 2014, 25.

⁴⁵ Saaf underlines in this respect that "the prince, in authoritarian contexts, does not need the insights of others. He knows he is the only one who knows. When an exchange is concluded between the two authorities – that of power and that of knowledge – it is less to enlighten the prince than to justify and legitimize his choices." See AFSP 2009.

⁴⁶ Author's field notes, May 2015.

⁴⁷ Cherkaoui 2009, 11.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

scientific research (0.8%), does not exceed 7%.⁴⁹ In contrast, the remaining considerable share (93%) is dedicated to the techno-sciences, although the number of HSS students represents more than 75% of the Moroccan student population.⁵⁰

The minor budget allocation devoted to HSS partly explains the miserable conditions impeding social science knowledge production in Morocco, including a lack of funding, insufficient human resources, inadequate training, poor infrastructure and the research system's modest openness to the private sector and socio-economic environment.⁵¹ A widespread view among HSS scholars contends that the state still considers social science research an 'unproductive sector' that drains the state budget.⁵² This explains its marginality compared to the techno-sciences.

In contrast, from the perspective of the governmental actor, the state is truly accountable for lacking a sound, integral public research policy that can promote social-science research within the whole scientific research system. But the current precarious situation of HSS is rather the shared responsibility of multiple agencies. Put differently, the marginal presence of HSS within the national system of research and innovation is presented as a constant fact.⁵³ Yet there is no agreement on the common prejudices spread by university elites and research professors themselves, attributing all blame to the state.⁵⁴ The official view maintains that the state is significantly aware of the vital need for HSS to support socio-economic development priorities and keep pace with the country's societal transformations.⁵⁵ The many surveys and diagnostic reports carried out by the Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education since 2005 on the situation and prospects of the HSS production system indicate the existence of the political will to integrate social sciences into the state's societal project.⁵⁶

Regardless of the indicators related to budgeting, funding, and other structural conditions affecting social science knowledge production, there are two opposite views about the status of political science particularly, and its vital worth to political power. Some scholars believe that the state has developed a suspicious wariness toward any critical knowledge escaping from surveillance and censorship, fearing it may become, over time, sites of oppositional discourse. Socio-

⁴⁹ Cherkaoui 2009, 49.

⁵⁰ DESFCRS Report 2011, 25.

⁵¹ Cherkaoui 2009.

⁵² Aouchar 2011; Ezzine 2011.

⁵³ DESFCRS Report 2011, 19.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 36

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵⁶ Cherkaoui 2009, 44; MERSFC Report.

logy in the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, was often depicted as a ‘despised discipline’⁵⁷ for being ideologically oriented and politically engaged. “For the first generation of Moroccan sociologists, research and political engagement had to go hand in hand.”⁵⁸

Other scholars, in contrast, claim that this discipline better serves the prevailing political powers. Political science, being much concerned with comprehending reality and laying bare its complexities, provides political power with the means for fostering resilience and taking control of society. This idea has been raised both in the case of sociological knowledge produced by French colonial powers⁵⁹ and in post-independent Morocco. According to Pascon, sociological knowledge, like any scientific undertaking, hardly escapes being manipulated by political authorities.⁶⁰ The many evaluation survey reports, funding programs, and national strategies on social sciences, some cited above, demonstrate the official concern and demand for the social sciences. Still, the state’s vital demand for political social science makes sense in the framework of a realistic-utilitarian outlook that prioritises socio-economic development and political problem-solving, which enables the decision-maker to preserve political power’s stability and resilience.

Against the backdrop of the representations and institutional conditions shaping Morocco’s social-sciences production today, I initiated research focusing primarily on a Rabat-based African imams’ training program. Given the lack of funding and bureaucratic complications of conducting field research, securing a research grant from the American Political Science Association (APSA) in 2014 was extremely motivating and of practical use. This individual research grant allowed me the relative autonomy to conduct impartial research. It also opened the door to additional research development opportunities and networks at regional and international levels.

Another international funding opportunity happened to be available for the second part of my field research project. I managed to secure an individual research grant from the African Peace Network (APN) of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). This grant program was part of a comprehensive SSRC program to support young African scholars, enhance their capacity and increase the regional and international visibility of their work. This generous grant enabled me to undertake field research in Morocco and two sub-Saharan African

⁵⁷ Guessous 2003, 215; Ezzine 2011.

⁵⁸ Rachik 2007, 10–11.

⁵⁹ Guessous 2003, 219–20.

⁶⁰ Pascon 1986, 59.

countries: Senegal and Mali. It also provided me with two training and methodological workshop opportunities abroad.

In operational terms, however, many difficulties emerged in the course of this research project, such as negotiating access to the research field, positionality, and managing ambiguous relationships with research participants.

Challenges of Accessing the Field and Positionality

Accessing official documents and data related to Morocco's transnational religious policy proved extremely problematic. The same goes for persuading some officials to engage as research participants and interviewees. Early attempts to access official data and conduct interviews with officials were disappointing. The official procedure requires the researcher to acquire formal permission. A government administrator cannot hand out official data and documents without sanctioned approval from their superiors; otherwise, the official would be held accountable and could even risk his or her professional career.

This bureaucratic culture is not limited to employees and officials but is successfully implanted even among local and foreign student imams involved in the training program supervised by the Moroccan Ministry of Islamic Affairs. An anecdote is worth reporting here. I first visited the Malian imams' training school in Rabat in 2014.⁶¹ I planned to arrange interviews with the director and some Malian imam trainees. The director was not there that day. As I was about to leave, I came across several trainees in the school yard on their way to Friday prayer. After I explained the nature of my research, I handed some of them my contact cards and suggested that interviews might be arranged later. Three days later, I received a phone call from the director to inform me that some of the students had reported our interaction. After he gently reproached me, saying I should have knocked on his door first, he explained why the administration recommends that imam trainees not talk to any foreigner unless allowed. In fact, the Moroccan training program of African Imams gained (and still gains) far-reaching momentum at the regional and international levels. Concerns about a potential manipulation or penetration of this emerging experience thus made sense. Either way,

⁶¹ This state-sponsored training program, initiated in late 2013, was later merged into the Mohammed VI Institute for Training Imams Murshidin and Murshidat launched in 2015. For further details about this training program: Hmimnat 2019; Hmimnat 2022.

the director agreed in principle to facilitate my field research within the training school. However, he requested an official permission from the Moroccan Ministry of Islamic Affairs. “I can’t act on my own,”⁶² he replied. Actually, the story was repeated with many other officials who initially accepted to be interviewed, then changed their minds at the last moment. Some confided that they retracted their approval because they are subject to tight internal surveillance by the Ministry. An official was once scolded because he happened to talk to a media outlet on his own, without the ministry’s green light.

Actually, I was not very optimistic about the feasibility of securing official research permission. I had already tried desperately during my doctoral research, when I experienced many bureaucratic delays and formalities. I thought, however, that I could try again. As the Ministry of Islamic Affairs was then headed by a former director of IEA,⁶³ I had assumed that a request from a fellow researcher at the IEA would facilitate my scientific mission. While logical at first sight, this prediction proved naive and even deceptive. Many written requests for field research permission and two gentle reminder letters to the ministry remained unanswered. Instead, in 2015, the IEA’s administration informed me that an official from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs (who shall remain nameless) had called to inquire about my request for field research. The IEA administration suggested that I submit a statement of personal ‘commitment’ indicating that my research falls under the academic activities of the IEA and would be published as such. I had no clue who might be behind this suggestion but, to make things work, I submitted the so-called ‘commitment.’ Still, I received no follow-up.

It is worth noting that I submitted a similar request to the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, hoping to access the religious cooperation agreements between Morocco and several other African countries. After months of waiting, I realised that attempts to request field research clearance and access to official data from governmental agencies, in my case at least, lead nowhere. Some administrative staff themselves confessed, off the record, that such official requests are hopeless. In the end, they said, “things should be settled on personal grounds.”⁶⁴ Despite a rhetoric of openness and stated commitment to communicate clearly with citizens, bureaucratic complications and secrecy continue to prevail in the Moroccan administration.

⁶² Author’s field notes, June 2014.

⁶³ Ahmed Taoufik, current minister of Islamic affairs (2002–), served as the first director of the IEA between 1990 and 1994.

⁶⁴ Author’s field notes, June 2014.

While my requests to government bodies were to no avail, I paradoxically witnessed prompt, responsive care to foreign researchers' requests to undertake scientific missions on similar topics (the training of African imams). European and American colleagues, many of whom I happened to meet, rapidly obtained permissions from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, accessed the imams training school, and even interviewed officials and students with ease. I have also documented the case of a Moroccan MA student from the International University of Rabat (UIR)⁶⁵ who enjoyed the same privilege. When investigating the matter, I found out that foreign researchers' requests are often subject to different protocols. Their requests are sent on behalf of international cultural organisations, or through diplomatic channels by foreign embassies, which explains the exclusive care and quick favourable treatment they receive. Other requests, made through the ordinary administrative procedure, may receive favourable treatment because they concern international students or scholars from prestigious British or US-American universities. 'Local' researchers have become bitterly accustomed to this ironic treatment, and, as my case suggests, many consider alternative tactics.

Another explication must be added in this regard. The favourable treatment granted foreign academic researchers probably matches Morocco's institutional communication and marketing strategy to increase the international visibility of the brand-new imams' training school, the Mohammed VI Institute for Training Imams Murshidin and Murshidat. Since its inauguration in 2015, foreign political figures, diplomatic delegations, cultural elites, and international media have been constantly solicited to visit it. Morocco has reaped the fruits of this well-elaborated marketing strategy, as evidenced by numerous television programs and news reports praising the experience and underlining its authenticity and world leadership.

From this marketing perspective, field research carried out by *an insider* seems not really momentous, or the research questions and their critical sensitivity did not perfectly match the official narratives. Also, perhaps, Mohammed V University in Rabat, to which the researcher belongs, does not have an aura of 'prestige' like its reputable counterparts Harvard or Oxford. The institutional affiliation and the researcher's identity here do make difference.

After months of unsuccessful attempts to *officially* access the research field, I came up with an alternative strategy to help break through into it: invest intensively in building a network of personal relationships. The expression "break through" is purposely used here to illustrate that the research topic, given its sensitive geopolitical nature related to Morocco's quest for continental leadership

⁶⁵ UIR is a semi-public university founded in 2010.

and influence,⁶⁶ seemed surrounded by an intractable fence preventing unauthorised persons from access. Building such a relational network certainly requires a significant investment of time and patience. For some officials, the idea of being engaged with a local researcher on questions that concern the *domaine réservé* of the Moroccan monarchy might seem risky. The researcher, therefore, must make a strenuous effort to build trust and reassure research participants, many of whom are high-ranking state elites.

This alludes to another type of positionality in qualitative research: the one between the researcher and research participants. In identifying potential interviewees for this research project, I was always curious about the motives behind their engagement in the ‘game of research.’ Comprehending such motives is essential to appropriately integrating the interview findings into the research axes. The research participants’ motives obviously differ according to their professional rank and their rational-pragmatic calculations about the policy under investigation. The motives also differ according to the interviewees’ nationalities, the setting of the interview, and their relationship with and position towards the researcher. Such elements altogether shape and significantly alter the researcher’s positionality.

In the context of a research question that touches diverse transnational contexts and geopolitical interests, the insider/outsider status becomes blurry. It does not always unfold in simple terms, depending on whether the field research is conducted in one’s home country or outside. The insider/outsider binary here becomes intricate, depending on whether the interviewees are of the same nationality as the researcher and whether the interviews and participant observation occur on Moroccan soil or elsewhere. Both the interviewer and interviewees’ perspectives, motivations, ideological backgrounds, and calculations vary more or less depending on the research context and setting.

In the Moroccan setting, the interviews involved several participants with varied backgrounds and motivations. Some interviewees cooperated with the researcher only to please a shared friend or acquaintance. For another type of interviewee, the motivations seem much clearer. This is the case for several African imam trainees in Rabat whose collaboration with the researcher reflects intensive advocacy efforts to draw attention to some technical issues plagued the training program and, most importantly, secure careers at home countries after the two-year training. Others, Moroccan officials in particular, cooperated based on the conviction that scientific research is valuable, and the expectation that it should contribute to rationalising policy-making and its implementation. The

⁶⁶ Hmimnat 2020a.

involvement in research, for this type of interviewee, also reflects a personal commitment to better serve the nation that we Moroccans belong to. The *we* used here by some officials interviewed is an explicit evocation of the common sense of citizenship that binds the interviewee and interviewer together. Indeed, I took this as an opening toward a promising collaboration that could provide room for each to serve the country in his own way. Put concretely, it happened that the interviews covered issues too sensitive for an official to raise in internal official settings. In this case, the researcher is implicitly asked to mobilise his ‘academic authority’ to shed light on technical and procedural problems in the religious policy in question. Some officials would also suggest practical insights and recommendations of interest that can serve better or improve the policy under investigation.

Aware that the researcher might sometimes be used as a vehicle for conveying or amplifying certain discourses and narratives, this pragmatic form of collaboration between researcher and politician can be harnessed to elevate both academic research and policy-making. I happened to put myself in this game by authoring policy papers that seek an assessment of the ways Morocco’s religious policy toward Africa functions and the challenges facing its implementation on the ground by centring on two case studies: the Mohammed VI Institute for Training Imams Murshidin and Murshidat and the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulema.⁶⁷

My positionality became more complex and problematic when field research took place outside my home country. The research inquiry I investigated, in the sub-Saharan African countries involved, sought to understand how Morocco’s transnational religious policy operates, the patterns of its reception, effectiveness, and concrete influence. In Senegal and Mali, my positionality shifted to that of an outsider investigating the views of sub-Saharan African elites on Moroccan-African religious cooperation. The interviews involved sub-Saharan Africans associated with religious bodies (*zawiyas*), diplomats, intellectuals, and others attached to Moroccan transnational bodies such as the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulema. To stress the academic character of my research, I often showed my interviewees an official university certificate, confirming my professional identity and the academic framework of the project. Nevertheless, most interviews seemed not to budge about the pre-conceived view: This is a Moroccan academic researcher, who represents in one way or another the Moroccan state’s point of view, or at least cannot deviate much from it. These interviewees hardly deviated from the following official positions: Praising solid Morocco-African spiritual relationships as well as their historical and popular depth; welcoming

67 See Hmimnat 2019; Hmimnat 2020b.

the positive political impetus that these relations have received in recent years; touting Morocco's devotion and its efforts to preserve and sustain such spiritual relationships.

In inquiring about deficiencies in the policy in question, interviewees identified some challenges and shortcomings, whether on the Moroccan side or those of other African countries. They also proposed ways to improve religious cooperation and push it forward. Some criticisms and recommendations seem to reflect positional conflicts between local competitors. This is, for instance, the case of the sharp rivalry between the Tijanis and Muridian partisans in Senegal, or the well-known conflictual relationship between Sufis and Salafis. In other cases, interviewees even formulated recommendations that Morocco should consider to enhance Moroccan-African religious cooperation. Like their Moroccan counterparts, sub-Saharan African interviewees sometimes tended to turn the researcher-interviewer into a channel to communicate their visions to the Moroccan policy-makers. When reflecting on this manipulative tendency, I realised that the communication strategy I opted for in those countries might have caused the muddle. Although I hired local informants to facilitate fieldwork in Senegal and Mali, I was keen to contact in advance the Moroccan embassy in Senegal and Mali to inform them of my scientific mission there. This is a familiar step that researchers often take to secure their research journey in foreign countries they visit for the first time. In my case, I also expressed my interest in interviewing diplomatic officials. Once, given time pressure and the difficulty experienced in accessing the field, I resorted to the Moroccan embassy to facilitate contact with some key personalities in Senegal. Indeed, embassy officials managed to facilitate contact with many of them belonging to Sufi orders and other religious institutions. This is a stark contrast to the difficulties I had encountered when in Morocco. I have no clear explanation for why my treatment differed so much when outside of my home country. But I recognise that such a pragmatic tactic (i.e., seeking help from the embassy), regardless of its benefits, would affect the researcher's position and have certain side effects that should be outlined here.

This tactic indeed helped me to obtain significant data that was inaccessible in my home country. The Moroccan-African cooperation agreements concerning imam trainings are a perfect case in point. Regardless of the effectiveness and practical need for seeking help from the embassy, one should be aware that doing so may put the researcher in confusing and even sensitive situations. Two examples can be cited here. First, a research participant assumed that my professional connection with the embassy might enable me to secure a scholarship for one of their relatives. Another one thought I can help secure funding for his Quranic school. The second example, concerning the case of someone previously expelled from the Rabat-based training program due to aggressive behaviour towards

training-school colleagues and staff, is more sensitive. While I was considering getting in contact with this person for an interview, he was reportedly involved in a violent incident in his home country. My informant briefed me about the incident and urged me to report it to the Moroccan embassy. Although there was some initial hesitancy and anxiety, I explained to the informant that my job, as an academic researcher, is observing and seeking to understand, and as such, I should not, under any circumstances, get involved with the subjects under study. Reflecting later on this ethical dilemma and my earlier hesitant reaction to the issue, I have realised that as a researcher from the Global South, I have been short of any ethical rules or Dos and Don'ts in such critical situations. Field research ethics are barely taught to political science students in Moroccan law faculties. The researcher may find him-/herself acting on intuition or, at best, inspired by codes of conduct applying to scientific communities in other geographic areas, such as the American Political Science Association.

Publishing

Academic research acquires its concrete meaning through reporting and publishing research findings. The act of publishing gives the researcher a sense of accomplishment and ensures the communication of research findings to the public.

The catchphrase 'publish or perish' perfectly summarises the problematic challenge that faces most researchers in their struggle for academic survival. This idiomatic saying, initially highlighting the vital significance of publishing to academic researchers' visibility and the advance of scientific knowledge about their specialisation, has over time come to hide the dark side of the higher education system. Under the neoliberal management model, the system of higher education has become obsessed with "key performance indicators" and metrics, such as h-index scores, journal rankings, impact factors, and other standards of economic business logic, to boost the university's *cult of excellence*. In his controversial book *Dark Academia*, Fleming (2021) explains how the much-quoted phrase 'publish or perish' has become a weapon, turned against academics who will be discarded if they do not embrace the logic of high competition.

In the Moroccan academic context, the 'publish or perish' pressure is posed differently, but is not without paradoxes and complexities. In a constrained institutional environment where the conditions of knowledge production and publication are miserable and the traditions of peer-evaluation still weak, academic publishing in high-ranking international journals turns into an adventure that

requires plenty of professional dedication and constant perseverance. Successful experiences in this regard are often the result of individual efforts of the “solitary researcher”⁶⁸ rather than collective initiatives resulting from well-designed research structures framed by a sound research development policy. Under the current research regulations, those labelled ‘productive researchers’ for their rich record of publication in indexed peer-reviewed journals barely benefit from incentives and promotion in return for their regular scientific production. Their work is rarely acknowledged or discussed by local peers.⁶⁹ In a context where opportunities for visibility and incentives are limited, what motivates productive researchers to publish is their professional awareness and a belief in academic work as a vocation rather than a profit-making enterprise.

This brief reminder of the degraded reality of academic publishing in Morocco, which might easily be extended to other Global South contexts, helps to apprehend another manifestation of pragmatic research that informs the paper’s central hypothesis. In the challenging academic context described above, one should carefully consider certain forms of publication over others, narrowly reaching the target constituency, and maximising the impact of published research. Overall, academic researchers, in the Moroccan context, as in other Global South countries, often find themselves facing three distinct options:

- *Publish locally and perish globally.*⁷⁰ This is the case of local or ‘provincial researchers’ who publish mainly in Arabic, mostly in non-indexed local journals, many of which lack scientific committees for reading and peer evaluation. Those opting for this choice run the risk of becoming invisible or being marginalised⁷¹ at international level. This category of researchers shows a good contextual understanding of the socio-political reality they study, yet their inquiries and perspectives mostly remain provincial in scope and circulation. Moreover, their research’s outcomes and findings are often communicated in a jargon language and concepts that are intelligible only by local researchers.⁷²
- *Publish globally and perish locally.*⁷³ This is the case of “cosmopolitan researchers”⁷⁴ with extensive publications in international journals in multiple foreign languages. These have greater chances of integrating into inter-

⁶⁸ Rachik 2007, 61–62; Cherkaoui 2009, 53.

⁶⁹ Hanafi and Arvanitis 2015, 168.

⁷⁰ Hanafi 2011; Cherkaoui 2009.

⁷¹ Ward 2015.

⁷² Rachik 2007, 61.

⁷³ Hanafi 2011.

⁷⁴ Cherkaoui 2009, 20.

national networks and research groups. Yet, their presence in national discussions remains minimal and thin due to the lack of an interactive dynamic between members of the same discipline, and, as previously mentioned, the absence of a scientific community.

- Finally, there are those who are entirely out of the publishing business and thus, *perish both locally and globally*.⁷⁵ This is the case for a large number of professors in Moroccan universities who are turned into instructors with no research or publication records. The famous evaluation report estimates that 55 percent of faculty have not published a single line in their lives.⁷⁶ “Intellectual sterility” does not only affect universities and young researchers but is endemic in old, large faculties and among the elderly.⁷⁷

The motives and reasons for choosing one option over another depend on the set of opportunities and constraints each researcher encounters. They can also be defined to a great extent by the poor working conditions and underprivileged environment shaping social science knowledge-production in Morocco, as previously mentioned. The researcher in a Global South context such as Morocco has little margin of manoeuvre in this regard. To find one’s way in a challenging research environment, one should typically rely on personal effort, training capacity, and the international collaborative research opportunities that have remarkably flourished since 2011. In the end, the pragmatic endeavour and struggle for academic survival matter more in navigating the labyrinth and oftentimes frustrating experience of academic research career.

In this specific context, I have taken advantage of several methodological and training workshops on engaged research, and my pragmatic publishing approach consists of combining substantial academic articles and brief policy papers in two languages, Arabic and English. This publishing plan requires careful ‘tuning of the research text’⁷⁸ in terms of method, writing style, and the language of publication. This tuning helps formulate research questions, ideas, and conclusions more accurately and professionally to match the target audience’s concerns, be they the scientific community, political circles and decision-makers, or the general public. Whether the research work is theoretical, heuristic, or concerned with action and practice, “the text attuning,” as Pascon reminds us, “responds

⁷⁵ Hanafi and Arvanitis 2015, 173.

⁷⁶ Cherkaoui 2009, 23.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Pascon 1986.

little to a scientific protocol, so much as it engages in a battle for the ideological representation of Morocco.”⁷⁹

Such a pragmatic choice seems an appropriate way to ensure fair visibility, maximise influence and extend networking in the scholarly community. It also helps the researcher gain credibility and maintain relationships of trust and commitment with funders who often stress publishing research-based papers with impact and relevancy for public policy decision-making and its evaluation.

Quantitatively speaking, the outcome of this personal experiential process of pragmatic research proved very promising: three policy papers and three scientific articles.⁸⁰ However, the practical impact of such research papers remains unclear. We still lack viable indicators to help measure how those scholarly policy papers have been received and considered for decision making. All we have are some anecdotes, impressions, and reactions that circulate informally among researchers, which reflect the state elite’s views of the worth of academic scientific research and uncovers overlapping interests and stakes surrounding the power-knowledge nexus that fall into the cameral reasoning indicated above.

In any case, the main stakes for academic research today, in light of the current reality of the social sciences in Morocco, is the ability to tread a fine pragmatic line between ensuring intellectual autonomy and contributing to an open and productive dynamic of scientific research that is integrated into national and international environments. The pragmatic formula proposed in this paper, which stems from an individual field experience, is a tentative attempt to provoke further discussion of research practices and strategies to strengthen the social sciences in socio-political development and decision-making processes.

Conclusion

In the Moroccan context, where knowledge production in the social sciences faces numerous challenges and difficulties, reflexive thinking and field investigation should be crucially promoted to improve the critical and empirical depth of research knowledge. Doing so would encourage alternative institutional and personal practices that could help researchers to cope effectively with deadlocks and obstacles encountered in field research.

⁷⁹ Pascon 1986, 144.

⁸⁰ See Hmimnat 2019; Hmimnat 2020a; Hmimnat 2020b; Hmimnat 2022; Hmimnat forthcoming.

Social and political research needs to broaden its circle of interests and recipients, by shifting away from the dry academic vision that tends to imprison academic knowledge within pure theoretical concerns disconnected from complex and pressing issues posed by the socio-political environment. It is more urgent than ever to think of reflexive and thinking modes that combine the critical depth crucial for academic knowledge and the political relevance associated with the decision-maker's vital interests.

Under weak structural condition, with poor incentives for research production in social sciences, researchers from the South and their European and American counterparts should consider developing innovative collaborative practices and networking mechanisms to exchange experiences and promote knowledge-sharing on pressing issues of mutual interest. Flexible institutional and individual partnerships can help foster training opportunities, grant and mobility programmes, and capacity-building for engaged research with impact. This promising pathway would bridge the substantial gap in social sciences knowledge production between the two sides.

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Susanne Schmeidl

Whose Stories, Whose Voices, Whose Narratives?

Challenging the Western Gaze on Afghanistan – Exploring Ethical Knowledge Co-Production in Afghanistan

An Afghan encounters a foreigner (kharijee) on the street and greets him: “Hello, my friend, when did you arrive to our beautiful country?”

The foreigner replies: “Yesterday.”

The Afghan then asks: “How long will you stay my friend?”

The foreigner replies: “Until tomorrow.”

The Afghan then notes: “Oh, my friend, this is a very short time, what did you come to do?”

The foreigner replies: “To write a book.”

The Afghan, now puzzled, asks: “Tell me my friend, what is the book about?”

The foreigner replies: “Afghanistan: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.”

I do not remember exactly when a friend first told me this anecdote, but it has stayed with me for at least a decade, as an apt parable of how many Afghans view the production of knowledge about their country. Around the same time, another good friend half-jokingly asked me when I was going to write my book on Afghanistan. When I hesitated and told him the joke, he laughed and added: “Well, at least you would have something to say, given the time you have spent here.” Although I was flattered by my friend’s comment, I knew it was also tongue-in-cheek, and it deepened my anxiety about ever writing a book about Afghanistan. If I ever wrote a book, I had decided, I would open it with this anecdote, because I felt that humour – in the form of jokes or short anecdotes, sometimes in the form of poetry – was a way in which Afghans tended to convey meaning and describe reality better than I ever could. More recently, humour or storytelling has been identified as a form of “discursive resistance” or “mockery employed as a form of discipline or rebelling.”¹

Indeed, there are many jokes in Afghanistan, some of them even told among foreigners, one of which is that an Afghanistan expert is an oxymoron – impossible and contradictory, or that the self-assessment of one’s expertise on Afghanis-

1 Fluri 2019, 125.

tan is disproportionate to the length of time spent in the country.² So I struggle to call myself an expert on Afghanistan, knowing full well the limits of my expertise. Like Goethe's Faust, the more I knew, the more I came to appreciate what I did not know, and perhaps also what I could never know. This is to acknowledge that my very nature as a non-Afghan, "keeps me in the 'gap'"³ between my own knowledge and experience and that of Afghan citizens. I may have increased my knowledge and understanding over two decades of working with my Afghan colleagues, but my gaze will remain that of an outsider looking in.

Needless to say, I have not yet written that book, and I am not sure I ever will, so I use this joke here to illustrate what I see as a growing resentment among many Afghans about how knowledge about their country is produced. This was particularly evident during the international state-building project after 2001, when research on Afghanistan proliferated, driven by short-term policy-oriented research "reminiscent of the empirical positivism of the colonial gazetteers," replacing in-depth and analysis and longitudinal observation of Afghanistan.⁴

Afghan citizens have also begun to challenge this form of externalised knowledge production, in which they are relegated to the margins of their own story, as 'local flavour,' voices of those affected, or 'raw data,' but not as experts. I have seen this time and time again over the past two decades of working on and in Afghanistan, where I have had the great privilege of working with local organisations alongside Afghan colleagues who have helped me to better understand their country, as well as the limits of my own knowledge. This pushback against Western knowledge production is in line with Edward Said's seminal critique of Orientalism⁵, as well as more recent scholarship that questions how Western, colonial and empirical scholarship has shaped and distorted knowledge about Afghanistan.⁶

In this article, I use a form of autoethnography to offer my "reflective ruminations"⁷ on various experiences and encounters I have had while working in and about Afghanistan. This means that I also bring my emotions to bear,⁸ including acknowledging the discomfort and "sitting with the mess" that often

2 This is also known as the Dunning-Kruger effect, which describes the overconfidence that comes with limited knowledge and expertise, see Dunning et al. 2003.

3 See Kearney 2020, 68 who discussed this in relation to the 'gap' between her knowledge and experiences and that of the Indigenous mob she researched with.

4 Monsutti 2013a, 275.

5 Said 1978.

6 See Zeweri 2022; Manchanda 2020; Hanifi 2011.

7 See Butz and Besio 2009.

8 Meloni 2020.

comes with working in the field and which, through reflection helps us grow as researchers.⁹ I offer my observations and reflections in the form of vignettes or spotlights (or as I see it, a series of rabbit holes) to illustrate my journey and what has influenced my thinking about how we can achieve a more honest and ideally collaborative process of knowledge production. This is a nod to the rich Afghan tradition of storytelling.

In my reflections, I also draw on critical questions about ethical knowledge production raised by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her seminal book *Decolonizing Methodologies*¹⁰, as some of them had indeed been on my mind while working in Afghanistan: “Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?”¹¹ I do not answer all these questions directly, but try to use them as a guide or framework, and end by highlighting signposts that I believe need to be considered in order to improve research collaboration and the co-production of knowledge about Afghanistan between Afghans and outsiders like myself. These are: *respecting the embodied expertise and oral tradition of Afghan researchers; storytelling as a collaborative research practice; treating research as relational and an exercise in trust, as well as conversational and contextual.*

Outsider Positionality – Challenging the External White European Gaze

I have always had a great deal of curiosity and, as my grandmother used to say, I was too ‘nosy’ for my own good. According to my aunt, I always asked too many questions. Ever since I was a little girl, I’ve loved observing other people’s lives. Sitting on a train or walking through a city, I would look at houses and wonder about the stories of the people who lived in them, what they did, how they felt and what they talked about. It is this external gaze, coupled with an enormous curiosity, that I bring to my research and to this chapter.

⁹ Lenette 2020.

¹⁰ Smith 2012. The book’s first edition was published in 1999 and a more recent third edition was published in 2021. I reference the second edition here.

¹¹ Smith 2012, 43–44.

As I draw on autoethnographic reflections, or perhaps the practice of “reflexive ethnography,”¹² along with Said’s notion of Orientalism¹³, it is important that I first position myself in order to contextualise what I am writing. Being aware of one’s positionality and reflecting on how it relates to power and privilege, as well as the (dis)advantages that come with it, are cornerstones to understanding the impact one has on the research context and process.¹⁴ As Fujii notes, “to enter another’s world as a researcher is a privilege, and not a right,” which comes with an enormous responsibility to wrestle with ethical dilemmas; “and when taken seriously, it may be one of the most important benefits we have to offer those who make our work possible.”¹⁵ In the next few paragraphs, I will consider two aspects of my positionality: *who I am* as a person (which influences how I might be perceived), but also *how I am* as a person, including my belief systems (e.g., the desire to act with empathy) and my emotions.¹⁶

Drawing on Said, I must first acknowledge that, as a German, I come to the Orient – here Afghanistan – first as a European, and second as an individual,¹⁷ and therefore with some heavy baggage. This “invisible knapsack,” a term coined by Peggy McIntosh,¹⁸ was introduced to me by the First Nations scholar Lauren Tynan when we taught together at UNSW Sydney. It has become a useful metaphor for me to think about what I bring to the field. Reflexivity helps me to make the contents of this knapsack more visible. By engaging with it, I have come to see it not just as weighty baggage that I need to manage carefully, but also as containing useful tools that have helped me to become a better and perhaps also more honest researcher.

I am a white female researcher born in southern Germany to a father whose family came from Bavaria and to a mother whose family came from Westphalia, and I grew up in different parts of Franconia, as my family moved around quite a lot. This nuance is important, because as the daughter of an essentially ‘mixed marriage,’ I was often confronted with the question ‘you’re not from here, are you’ when I arrived at a new school, simply because I did not sound like a local (we spoke High German at home because of my mother). This experience made me realise early on that context matters, and that context is very local. I came to appreciate the intense nature of the ‘tribalism’ that still exists in modern

12 See Kearney and Bradley 2020.

13 See Fasavalu and Reynolds 2019.

14 See England 1994.

15 Fujii 2012, 722.

16 See Pettit 2006.

17 See Said 1978, 11.

18 See McIntosh 1989; McIntosh 2015.

Germany. I also learnt early on what it means to be an ‘outsider,’ or at least to be perceived as such, and the discomfort that comes from not fully belonging.

As a German, I also grew up with the baggage of Nazi history and the Holocaust, or as I tell my students, growing up on the ‘wrong’ side of history. This means that I have learned to sit with a great deal of discomfort and guilt about the fact that my ancestors having committed genocide and other crimes against humanity. Acknowledging and essentially owning this aspect of my positionality, and the discomfort that comes with it, has made me a humbler and, hopefully, more empathetic researcher. I understand that there is no predetermined way of being and acting, and that no society has warmongering as an inherent part of its DNA (something I had repeatedly heard about the Germans). This has helped me to ‘other’ Afghans less, and to understand that conflict and inhumanity can co-exist with cooperation, kindness, and peaceful progress.

I also come from a place of privilege, having had access to higher education, although not in a straightforward way. I started my social work studies at a technical university and went on to do an MA and PhD at a US university on a partial, albeit prestigious, Fulbright scholarship. Having had to work hard for my education, and considering myself lucky to have obtained a PhD, has made me humble about the privilege of being able to further my knowledge. Throughout my education, Goethe’s *Faust*, which I read at school, was always at the forefront of my mind, his agony over knowledge a reminder that, despite all we learn, there is always more to learn, and much knowledge may remain beyond our reach. As I mentioned before, after two decades of research on Afghanistan, I honestly have the feeling that I have barely scratched the surface. There is still so much to learn, unlearn and discover.

My initial training as a social worker taught me reflexivity and exposed me to the influential work of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*¹⁹, which introduced me to critical perspectives and activist scholarship. I was also introduced to the work of Paul Watzlawick²⁰ and the notion that ‘reality’ is essentially constructed, if not even invented, and the importance of paying attention to how communication can work to obstruct meaning. For example, I have reflected elsewhere on my lack of adequate fluency in either of Afghanistan’s two national languages (Dari and Pashto), especially in contrast to other research contexts, such as Mexico, where I spoke the language and thus had comparatively greater access.²¹ I still need the help of a translator during my research when I want to

¹⁹ Freire 1971, when his 1968 book was first translated into German.

²⁰ Watzlawick 1976 and 1981.

²¹ See Schmeidl 2020.

go beyond very basic conversations. This means that I may inadvertently miss nuances, or that the meaning I take away is the result of what the research participant said, the translation provided, and my understanding at the time. However, I am grateful that my basic language skills, coupled with the active listening and observation skills I learned during my social work training, helped me to follow the general thrust of the conversation and to recognise when parts were left out in the translation.

I could go on unpacking my positionality, such as how being raised in a religious family gave me respect for religious knowledge and the importance of religion in people's lives,²² or how being a woman has made me more aware of the power imbalances and constraints that come with patriarchy,²³ but I don't want to be too indulgent either. What I have tried to demonstrate is the importance of ongoing reflexivity as a way of facilitating ongoing engagement with one's own biography and how it interacts with the research context, the people who inhabit it, and the process of knowledge production.

Importantly, however, despite my commitment to reflexivity, it was a move to Australia and to an Australian university that brought me into contact with indigenous and decolonial methodologies and scholars engaged with them, that accelerated my learning journey and significantly enriched my thinking. I would like to acknowledge the most important ones. First Nation scholars Jessica Russ-Smith, Lauren Tynan, and Professor Megan Davis, and three academics of European descent, like myself, who have chosen to engage differently with Indigenous and local knowledge: Linda Bartolomei, Amanda Kearney, and Nicholas Apoufis.²⁴ As I mentioned earlier, at the same time I came across the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who draws on the work of Edward Said.²⁵

All of these encounters opened my eyes and mind to different ways of knowing, different ways of producing knowledge and the power of decolonising methodologies. Suddenly, I was pushing against the boundaries of Western methodologies and beginning to explore a more place-based form of knowledge production. I also began to better understand the methodological struggles I had experienced while working with two local organisations in Afghanistan. To this day, I regret that instead of being bold and proud of the different way of doing research that my Afghan colleagues and I had developed together, I stopped at describing what

²² See Schmeidl 2007.

²³ See Schmeidl 2020.

²⁴ There are others I should also acknowledge, such as Tanya Jakimow and Caroline Lenette, those mentioned were the most important in influencing my perspective at the time.

²⁵ Smith 2012.

we were doing and felt the need to justify (possibly apologise for) our approach to research and knowledge production when it differed from Western methodologies. I later found out that of course I was by no means alone in feeling the need to explain myself, as this is the somewhat unfair labour expected of those working outside Western research paradigms.²⁶

It was the engagement with my new colleagues in Australia and the more recent encounters facilitated by the *co²libri* project, to which one of the co-editors of this book, Andrea Fleschenberg, invited me, that gave me the courage to write this chapter, which is far more experimental than anything I have written before. Although I do so with a great deal of anxiety about not doing justice to the scholars I am referring to, and in particular to Afghan ways of knowing and doing research.

Of Extractive Research and the Use of Afghan Knowledge as “Secondary” – Making Knowledge Co-Production Visible

Research, by its very nature, is always extractive, seeking information and insights from others. This “stealing of stories” has not gone unnoticed, indeed it has been challenged by research participants,²⁷ and attention has increasingly turned to the co-production of knowledge as an ethical practice.²⁸ I would like to share some anecdotes of extractive research practices – as witnessed by myself or told to me by Afghan colleagues – that treat Afghan knowledge as secondary or as a form of ‘raw data,’ essentially rendering their expertise invisible.

I vividly recall a conversation I had with an Afghan colleague and friend in which he recounted an experience he had had with a Western researcher. I share this anecdote with his permission. He had taken the researcher to one of the provinces where the organisation he was working with was also conducting research and had arranged interviews for the researcher. In other words, he provided access and facilitated the research process, sometimes called research brokering²⁹. However, his support went further: he also engaged in a longer discussion about the context and what they were hearing from research participants,

²⁶ See Bessarab and Ng’andu 2010.

²⁷ Pittaway, Bartolomei and Hugman 2010.

²⁸ See Lenette 2022.

²⁹ Baaz and Utas 2019.

sharing his analysis and insights. Later, when he saw the published outcome of the research – and my understanding is that there had been no further exchange since the visit – not only had his research brokering not been acknowledged, but he also felt that his analysis and insights had been incorporated into the research product without him being credited. My friend told me how he felt upset, violated, essentially stripped naked, and all I could do was share my outrage at what had happened.

I wish such experiences were isolated, but I am afraid they are quite common. In another case, another Western researcher approached the local organisation I was working with for help in gaining access to research participants (knowledge brokering). An Afghan colleague helped a great deal with this, including having long conversations with this particular Western researcher. When the report was published, I noticed that there was no acknowledgement of the local organisation or my colleague for their contributions to the research product. When I pointed this out, the Western researcher argued that there was not enough space in the acknowledgements section to acknowledge everyone who had helped him (although he did find space to acknowledge his girlfriend at the time), and insisted that my Afghan colleague was listed as one of the people he had interviewed, so was indeed ‘acknowledged,’ albeit as ‘raw data,’ a mere footnote to the larger story produced by the Western researcher. I am still angry about this experience, as I felt responsible for allowing the Western researcher to exploit my colleagues in this way.

It is possible that in both cases the Western researchers acted ‘unintentionally,’ having been trained in the Western imperial research tradition, which creates a hierarchy between “a white knower and an Indigenous subject to be known.”³⁰ Regardless of intention, the practice of knowledge extraction over knowledge co-production is increasingly challenged by First Nations and Global South scholars as leading to “disembodied expertise,” divorced from the standpoint and ontology of the knower and ultimately “the raced and gendered body attached” to it.³¹ It is disrespectful to the knowledge and knowledge holders (experts) based in or from Afghanistan. Extractive research is similar to the ‘fly-in, fly-out’ (FIFO) practice used in the extractive sector, so perhaps it is appropriate to speak of FIFO researchers. I will do so for the remainder of this chapter, in the hope of contributing to a much-needed dialogue about how we do research. However, if I am being completely honest, there is a nagging question in the back of my mind about how often I myself might have been involved in extractive

³⁰ Moreton-Robinson 2004, acknowledged in Tynan and Bishop 2019, 223.

³¹ Tynan and Bishop 2019, 223.

research. After all, I could not have conducted research in Afghanistan without the help of Afghan colleagues, friends, translators, elders, and many others.³² It is perhaps this concern that has led me down this path of thinking about better ways of collaborating in research.

I was heartened recently when an Afghan scholar on a panel about the fall of Kabul challenged this use of Afghans as anecdotal witnesses to their history, rather than recognising them as scholars capable of analysis and theory. A few months later, however, I was again disheartened when I had to apologise profusely to an Afghan intellectual whom I had invited to a workshop where the white Western scholar was treated as the ‘expert’ and my Afghan colleague as essentially a local flavour. My Afghan colleague reported that he felt he had to be ‘careful’ about what he said because he was expected to provide ‘lived experience’ rather than expertise. I was devastated because I wanted him to be there because of the depth of his expertise, which was greater than that of the Western researcher. To me, he was the only expert in the room. However, in the workshop setting, I observed that some of the participants seemed to perceive him as the supporting act. For me, this underscores how entrenched the unconscious bias is in Global North institutions to see Global South scholars as subjects of research rather than agents of knowledge production, and this will not be changed simply by inviting Afghan expertise into the room. We need to identify and challenge such unconscious biases in order to change them.

What Indigenous Methodologies Teach Us about Acknowledging Afghan Ways of Knowledge Production

In my research collaborations with local organisations and researchers in Afghanistan, we worked hard to adapt our research practice to the context, and recorded this process in a methodological note that grew in length over time. Because I saw this as an important ethical practice, I was struck by a question from a visiting researcher: “Why on earth do you write such long methodology sections? All these disclaimers just make people doubt the quality of your research, which is very good. Look at other research that might only have one paragraph about their methodology, if that.” This comment, although well-intentioned, still makes me

³² See Schmeidl 2020.

angry, although perhaps for different reasons now than when I first heard it. I was angry then because I felt that our approach was the right one, and indeed that other researchers should give more detail about how they did their research so that their findings could be better judged. I often felt that a thin methodology was an indication that individuals wanted the reader to trust the results because they were experts, rather than because of the quality of their research, and therefore spoke with more authority than they perhaps should have. I now realise that part of the reason I was angry was because our methodology section was written in the language of research limitation rather than framing it as an Afghan way of doing research, indeed a uniquely Afghan epistemology. This set me on a journey to decolonise my own research approach and to engage in a process of unlearning, and relearning.³³

In the following signpost sections, I outline a series of experience-based lessons. For me, these are the coordinates of my ethical research compass, which I continue to refine through reflexivity and engagement with Indigenous and decolonising methodologies. Like others before me, I combine Western and Indigenous methodologies where it makes sense.³⁴ I see these learnings as stepping stones to developing better and more equitable research collaborations. Although I have tried to divide these learnings into different signposts, they are very much interrelated, as will become clear.

Signpost 1: Respecting Afghan Researchers' Embodied Expertise and Oral Tradition

Indigenous methodology emphasises that “as researchers, we not only develop new knowledge but also build our knowledge on the existing works of others by expanding and enriching established research and research methodologies, giving us a deeper understanding of the human lived experience and the world around us.”³⁵ This treats Indigenous communities as holders of knowledge – not raw data – and must be respected. The question then becomes: how do we take into account and recognise (i.e. show respect for) the enormous expertise that our Afghan colleagues bring to the research process?

³³ See Datta 2018.

³⁴ See *ibid.*, 3.

³⁵ Geia, Hayes and Usher 2013, 13.

In my search for answers, I came across two academic contributions that addressed this very issue. The first was an editorial in a special issue of *Civil Wars* on “Research Brokers in Conflict Zones” by Maria Eriksson Baaz and Mats Uta,³⁶ and the second was an article by Kaitlin Fertaly and Jennifer Fluri on “Producing Knowledge in Fieldwork.”³⁷ Both articles argue that local research collaborators are too often overlooked and rarely get the recognition they deserve in academic publications. Baaz and Uta argue that many research brokers go beyond “facilitating research or gathering certain data [and] often become the eyes and ears of researchers, thus exercising a large influence on the latter’s grids of intelligibility, shaping not only the way in which they make sense of certain phenomena, but also what they see in the first place.”³⁸ Similarly, Fertaly and Fluri outline the “complex and at times complicated role and influence” that research associates have on data collection, interpretation and analysis, based on their local knowledge and cultural translation, which helps FIFO researchers to “negotiate spaces and situations, and solve problems as they arise.”³⁹ They see the term “research associates” as correcting “unidirectional and hierarchical structures that place the [Western] researcher as expert and knowledge producer while obscuring the diversity of roles conducted by field associates,” although they do acknowledge that such a re-labelling does not automatically “erase the asymmetric power dynamics that exist during (and after) fieldwork.”⁴⁰

How we label research collaborators is important, especially if we want to recognise expertise rather than services rendered. An Afghan colleague told me early on that he never wanted to be called a ‘fixer’ but rather a ‘consultant.’ And he was right; for me, he was at once risk consultant, contextual consultant, interpreter of language, culture and meaning, as well as knowledge broker and co-researcher. In fact, we went on to publish together, acknowledging that my understanding of Afghanistan was the result of a collaborative process.

This brings me to the discussion of how best to give recognition and credit to research collaborations. Baaz and Uta argue that the contribution of research brokers qualifies them to “be considered as full-blown ‘co-authors’ of research without writing a single word.”⁴¹ Fertaly and Fluri suggest either to “do away with authorship altogether” or “expand the concept and forms of authorship so that

³⁶ Baaz and Uta 2019.

³⁷ Fertaly and Fluri 2019.

³⁸ Baaz and Uta 2019, 157–58.

³⁹ Fertaly and Fluri 2019, 76.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Baaz and Uta 2019, 158.

multiple people can be included and their roles specified,” ultimately advocating for the latter.⁴² This practice of team authorship may not be so unusual, as it already happens outside the social sciences. I have worked on projects with colleagues in the hard sciences where knowledge products are seen as teamwork and everyone in the team becomes an author, not just those who put pen to paper. This could be good practice for mixed North-South research teams. Furthermore, given that so much research on Afghanistan is written in English, even though it is not an official language in the country, English language skills should not be privileged over other contextual expertise to avoid further externalisation of knowledge production. All of this would pave the way for more equitable research collaboration and help redress long-standing imbalances in knowledge production in contexts where Western researchers have historically taken credit for knowledge they could never have produced without the expertise, collaboration and generosity of Southern researchers.

Interestingly, it is Fertaly and Fluri’s first suggestion (to do away with authorship) that the local research organisation I worked with in Afghanistan decided to adopt by producing organisation-branded reports rather than engaging in a complicated discussion about authorship, particularly lead authorship. The idea was that this would give equal credit to everyone involved in the research process, from data collection to data interpretation, rather than just the lead author of the written product (usually a FIFO researcher). Why should the ‘white kid’ get most of the credit for his ability to write in English? I know that this practice was not always easy to swallow for some of the FIFO researchers we worked with, given the emphasis on (sole) authorship in much of Western academia, especially in the social sciences.⁴³ Ethically, however, I believe it was the right choice at the time, especially as it also protected Afghan colleagues from the possible risk of being associated with research critical of powerful individuals and groups. In the end, we erred on the side of caution and opted for institutional branding.

However, I did wonder later whether we might have deprived budding Afghan researchers of official recognition by prioritising institutional branding over individual authorship. I also wondered if we were inadvertently encouraging extractive research practices, because of course knowledge co-production is not just an issue between Western and Afghan researchers, but also a matter of how Afghan researchers acknowledge the help and collaboration they receive from their colleagues and, ultimately, the communities they work with. As mentioned earlier, it

⁴² Fertaly and Fluri 2019, 80.

⁴³ See *Ibid.*

is all too easy for poor research practices to be passed on and for local researchers to be co-opted by collaborators into imperial forms of knowledge production.

Thus, I agree with Baaz and Utas,⁴⁴ as well as Fertaly and Fluri,⁴⁵ that we should give credit where credit is due, especially in cultures with strong oral traditions, and opt for co-authorship when we engage in research collaborations. I believe that we would see a lot more co-authored research outputs if we did not insist that research collaborators put pen to paper and acknowledged that knowledge co-production can be oral, which would also honour the oral tradition in Afghanistan and guard against “making literacy superior to orality.”⁴⁶

Before concluding this section, I want to comment on researcher bias, because it is discussed in the literature in relation to working with local research collaborators,⁴⁷ but was also something that irritated my Afghan colleagues. They complained that their analyses were undervalued because outsiders automatically assumed that they were biased by the unique tribal, ethnic, urban, etc. lenses they brought to the research. Instead, white FIFO researchers were assumed to be (more) objective. This is, of course, absurd. As I showed in unpacking my positionality, all researchers come with baggage, simply different biases. Furthermore, the practice of “tribe-building” by FIFO researchers – described as “a useful way to recognise that without a trusted set of interlocutors to make introductions, share hard-earned wisdom and offer hospitality and protection, researchers cannot navigate the minefields – intellectual and otherwise – of the war zones they wish to study”⁴⁸ – comes with the associated lenses, politics and possibly groupthink that ‘tribes’ can bring.⁴⁹ In other words, no matter who we are (Western researcher or local (Afghan) expert), we all need to carefully unpack our positionality and practice reflexivity in the research process to keep our biases in check.

In the end, I always come back to Goethe’s Faust and the importance of gaining knowledge in an ethical way, not taking shortcuts out of greed (making a deal with the devil) or extracting knowledge for our own benefit (e.g. career advancement). We need to be honest about the limitations of our knowledge and our biases and recognise the knowledge and expertise that others bring to the research collaboration. I was privileged to have guides who helped me under-

44 Baaz and Utas 2019, 158.

45 Fertaly and Fluri 2019, 76.

46 Jackson 2020, xi.

47 See Themner 2022.

48 Parashar 2019, 251.

49 See Utas 2019; Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay 2016.

stand the local context and research in Afghanistan, close collaborators and colleagues who were willing to teach me about their culture and ways of knowing, and to whom I could ask questions. It would be unethical not to acknowledge the wisdom they have imparted to me.

Signpost 2: Storytelling as a Collaborative Research Practice

In the previous section I already emphasised the importance of recognising oral tradition in Afghan knowledge production. Here I would like to explore this further and its connection to storytelling and how it applies to collaborative research, which has long been recognised as important in Indigenous research.⁵⁰

I began this article with a small story or joke, noting that, in my experience, Afghans often speak through anecdotes and stories. Although I am aware that these stories can mean different things to different people depending on their positionality, I wish I had included them more often in my research and analysis. The following anecdote, told to a colleague by a community elder from Paktia during a research project on Taliban-community relations, opened my eyes to the power of working with stories.

Once, a shepherd was stopped by a group of Taliban and asked to explain what kind of people the Taliban were. The shepherd replied: “You people are angels.” The Taliban then asked what kind of people the government and international military forces were. The shepherd replied that they were also angles. The Taliban then asked who the bad people were. The shepherd replied, “Civilians are the bad people.”

I have discussed this story and its interpretation at length with my Afghan colleagues. Although others may interpret it differently, we felt it said so much about how the civilian population in parts of Afghanistan must have felt caught between a rock and a hard place between righteous warring parties who demanded that civilians choose sides. If each warring party sought the moral high ground, and it was the civilians caught in the middle who suffered, perhaps they must be the ‘bad guys’ by default. The story also conveys the risks that a research participant might feel in making a judgement and therefore choosing an indirect form of communication.

⁵⁰ See for example Iseke 2013.

This means that we need to listen to the stories that are being told, even if at first they seem to be evading the question. This requires “active listening,”⁵¹ or what First National scholar Jessica Russ-Smith calls the Indigenous practice of “listening to hear.”⁵² Bradley describes the importance of active listening when working with storytelling in the context of oral tradition:

Oral and western arts and scientific traditions not only speak from different perspectives; they are passed along in different ways. Oral traditions survive by repeated telling, repeated singings and each narrative contains more than one message. The listener is part of the storytelling process too, and is expected to think about and interpret the messages in the story. A skilled listener will bring different life experiences to the story each time they hear it and will learn different things each time. Oral tradition is like a prism, which becomes richer as we improve our ability to view it from a number of angles of perception. It does not try to spell out everything one needs to know, but rather to make the listener think about experiences in new ways.⁵³

Afghan researchers are often much more attuned to working with storytelling and can help interpret the stories that research participants tell. This also shows the importance of debriefing after interviews (making sense through dialogue) and discussing what we have heard, rather than jumping to conclusions, as we all make interpretations based on our positionalities, once again demonstrating the benefits of North-South research collaborations. Integrating storytelling and dialogue into research outputs, however, requires a rethinking and re-imagining of the nature of academic publishing that allows space for stories to be told and debated, which fortunately has already begun.⁵⁴

Signpost 3: Research as Relational and an Exercise in Trust

I have learnt over time and through reflexivity that research is relational and requires the building of trust, again something that Indigenous methodologies have long emphasised. On my first research trip to Afghanistan during the first Taliban Emirate in 2000, I interviewed the late Dr Suhaila Siddiqi, then quite famous as the only female surgeon the Taliban allowed to practice. The interview

⁵¹ See also Fujii 2018.

⁵² Oral presentation at a 2017 UNSW Sydney School of Social Sciences retreat.

⁵³ Bradley 2020, 52.

⁵⁴ See for example Gitau, Arop and Lenette 2023.

took place in her ministerial office, which was devoid of personal touches. She answered my questions politely, with short and sometimes rather non-committal answers to my questions. I felt that our conversation about women's health in Afghanistan was rather superficial. Towards the end, after perhaps an hour, when I thought the interview was over and was about to leave with my hand on the doorknob, something changed. Dr Siddiqi put her hand on my arm and, as we stood by the door, began to tell me about some of the difficulties she had encountered doing in her work, what she thought was needed to improve women's health under the Taliban, and the messages she wanted me to take back to international donors. I felt that the previous hour had been a mere introduction to the last fifteen or twenty minutes of our conversation. This has happened to me many times afterwards in other interviews, and I wondered why, until I shared it with a friend and colleague, Alessandro Monsutti, an experienced anthropologist and long-time Afghanistan researcher. He explained that the depth of an interview in Afghanistan was a direct reflection of the relationship one had built with the research participant and the communities. After all, Afghanistan was a country in conflict, where trust had become a quite scarce commodity,⁵⁵ so building rapport was obviously important. Until a researcher has established rapport (i.e. built a relationship) and established trust, it is rarely possible to scratch more than the surface. Thus Dr Siddiqi had spent the first hour assessing me, deciding if and how much I could be trusted, before revealing more.

I was embarrassed because I felt I should have known this. How presumptuous and arrogant to assume that I would be immediately trusted when I had just arrived, an unknown stranger, a FIFO researcher with no established relationships of trust; after all, information is a form of currency and sharing it with the wrong person can be dangerous. I reflected on how this experience differed from my previous research encounters in Mexico and the countries of the Horn of Africa. Firstly, in both research projects, I was introduced to communities and research participants by a local organisation that had worked with them for a long time, so there were established relationships. Secondly, in the case of Mexico, I spent time with the women at organisational events before interviewing them, and the women talked to each other about their encounters with me. I also had the advantage of being fluent in Spanish, and in the Horn of Africa project I had the advantage of having a co-researcher from Kenya. When I first arrived in Afghanistan, I had no language skills, no deep understanding of the context, and no trusted co-researchers. I developed these later. This shows not only the importance of relationships and trust, but also that these can be built by

⁵⁵ Monsutti 2013b.

local partners prior to the actual research engagement (i.e. by research brokers or associates), although these efforts and expertise are not always sufficiently recognised by FIFO researchers. In my experience, the best research insights were gained where I – or my Afghan colleagues – were able to build a relationship. This meant conducting interviews over several days or repeated visits, sitting together and drinking tea, building connections around shared interests or experiences that often came from opening up and discussing my positionality.

Fujii agrees that all interviewing is relational, built on trust that is “negotiated between the interviewer and interviewee and [...] shaped by the interests, values, backgrounds, and beliefs that each brings to the exchange.”⁵⁶ This also means that, “drawing on interpretivist assumptions, relational interviewing produces data that *emerge dynamically through dialogue* between researcher and interviewee”⁵⁷ [emphasis mine]. However, Indigenous methodologies caution us to be humble and understand that there may be limits to the relationship we can build as FIFO researchers. Lauren Tynan warns us that “relationality” is “a practice bound with responsibilities with kin and Country”⁵⁸ and thus should not be “reaped for academic gain.”⁵⁹ Otherwise, I think it becomes another form of exploitation.

In order to build relationships with local communities and at the same time give back (reciprocity), the local research organisation I worked with in Afghanistan ended up training members of the communities in the areas where we were conducting research so that they could actively participate in the research process and benefit financially. In other words, we traded technical research skills and the provision of livelihoods through paid employment for local expertise and access through established relationships. However, to my regret, we did not involve these people as much in the analysis process and not at all in the writing process, so we did not fully involve them as co-researchers. Based on my continued reflection and engagement with Indigenous methodologies, I see this as an error that I intend to rectify in the future by ensuring that all local parties are recognised as co-producers of knowledge. As I have noted before, I learn from my own mistakes and failures.

⁵⁶ Fujii 2017, 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Tynan 2021, 598.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Signpost 4: Research as Conversational

In the previous sections I have emphasised the importance of building trust, storytelling and dialogue between researchers. Following on from this, I see research in Afghanistan as emerging from dialogue or a series of conversations that help to build trust and relationships. Thus, my Afghan colleagues and I began to explore informal conversations as a more localised approach to qualitative interviewing, which is of course common in ethnographic research. Although initially driven by the need to manage risk in areas where it was simply too dangerous to use a written research guide, we had tapped into a uniquely Afghan way of doing research, one that valued oral tradition and relationality. At the time, however, I felt that this adaptation was potentially a weakness – especially when compared to more formal interview methods – until I came across the indigenous methodology of ‘yarning’ as a form of knowledge production.⁶⁰ Bessarab and Ng’andu describe “yarning, as opposed to narrative inquiry, [as] an informal and relaxed discussion; a journey both the researcher and the participant share as they build a relationship and visit topics of interest to the research.”⁶¹ They also discuss how they wrote the article in part to explain their more context-sensitive methodology after being challenged by more positivist-oriented researchers.⁶²

In its nuances, ‘yarning’ is very similar to the way Afghans communicate with each other and with outsiders. As a visitor, which is what researchers are, you are invited into a house and treated as a guest, offered tea and sweets. The purpose of a visit – or research – is never discussed at the outset until more general matters have been discussed (e.g. one’s own health, the health of the family, experiences of visiting Afghanistan or the region, etc.). Here, I often had to keep my ‘Germanisms’ in check, such as the desire to get straight to the point after a brief greeting, without exchanging cultural formalities and establishing positionality. Depending on the setting, this relationship building through ‘yarning’ may take several cups of tea, or repeated visits, certainly more time than we might allow for more formal interviews. Again, active listening skills are important to notice shifts in the conversation and to recognise when enough trust has been established to move to the next level of research dialogue.

I learned a lot through informal and conversational research practices, such as discussing gender equality with Afghan women on equal terms. Once I had established a level playing field with my research participants, treating them

⁶⁰ See also Geia, Hayes and Usher 2013.

⁶¹ Bessarab and Ng’andu 2010, 15.

⁶² *Ibid.*

equally as experts in a more global struggle of women with gender norms, I learned much more about the negotiated aspects of gender relations in Afghanistan⁶³ and where Afghan women felt Western approaches to women's empowerment were missing the mark. Now I find it hard to think of research as anything other than conversational and wish I had long ago abandoned more rigid Western research methods and embraced Afghan ways of doing research.

Signpost 5: Research as Contextual

I have already touched on the importance of understanding context in the previous sections. But it is worth returning to the seminal work of Mary Anderson, who coined the 'Do No Harm' approach,⁶⁴ and the importance of understanding context in everything we do, including research; we are always part of the context in which we operate and thus can cause harm. While Anderson's work was aimed at development actors, I found it equally applicable to research practice, particularly in reflecting on how our positionality interacts with the research context to either facilitate or hinder research.⁶⁵ This is also emphasised by Fujii, who argues the following about research encounters:

No matter their duration or quality, they are always rooted in a specific social context, formed in part by "who" the interviewer and interviewee are, both individually and in interaction, the time of day, physical location, and presence or proximity of others. The larger context in which researcher and participant come together is also part of the interaction. [For example], Meeting right before key elections, during a severe drought, or just after financial collapse will also shape the kinds of interactions in which researcher and participant engage.⁶⁶

This means that research means emerging with context rather than treating it as something that can be extracted, which of course takes time. We also need to engage in constant observation to create and maintain contextual awareness, something I have argued elsewhere that participant observation is underused in research.⁶⁷ Collaboration with researchers who know the local context is a good

63 See also Kandiyoti 1988.

64 Anderson 1999.

65 See also Bentele 2020.

66 Fujii 2018, 3.

67 Schmeidl 2020.

way of speeding up understanding and contextualising findings, although these are more fruitful when built over time and based on mutual respect.

Concluding Thoughts

As I emphasised at the outset, this chapter has emerged from an ongoing reflective journey in which I have tried to make sense of my research encounters and collaborations in Afghanistan. Although my reflective ruminations are far from complete, I have tried to share how I see part of a uniquely Afghan way of doing research as highly contextual, conversational, relational and ultimately an exercise in trust. I have also touched on the role of storytelling as a collaborative research practice that ultimately culminates in respect for Afghan oral traditions and local (embodied) expertise.

Writing this chapter has led me to look more closely at other literature and to realise that much of my thinking is not necessarily new but can be found in Indigenous research methodologies. Similarly, I have found that other researchers are grappling with similar issues and have been reassured that colleagues in the social sciences are beginning to ask more critical questions and no longer accept the holy grail of positivism that drives extractive research, peddles the myth of the researcher's detachment and, perhaps most importantly, assumes the superiority of Western methodologies.

Research and research collaborations are perhaps best understood as a journey or a work in progress. Drawing again on Mary Anderson's 'Do No Harm' approach,⁶⁸ I see research, like any other practice, as a series of ethical choices. Through reflexivity we can make these choices transparent and move towards a more collaborative research practice in which we strengthen – rather than undermine – local expertise, research methodologies and capacities to know and be known. Only then can we achieve a more equitable co-production of knowledge. There is, of course, more to be done, but it is certainly a journey worth pursuing. I would like to acknowledge that I could not have come this far without the encouragement of Andrea Fleschenberg and her involvement in the co²libri project, including this book collaboration, which gives me the opportunity to complete my unfinished business, hopefully through fruitful research collaborations.

⁶⁸ Anderson 1999.

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Fathima Nizaruddin

Academic *Tamasha* and its Limits under the Shadow of Authoritarianism*

Statutory Warning: This article's academic ambitions were occasionally disrupted by voices that were too unruly to be packaged within neat method bottles that are tied together by respectable citations from powers that be. In order to discipline these unruly voices, they are written in a different font.

Being an academic in the humanities can occasionally give one the sense of being less of a mercenary in the current world order. Having a tenured position in a space that is relatively higher in the academic food chain¹ or having hopes for such a position is conducive to achieving this slightly self-righteous view about oneself. In my journeys through the corridors of academia in India (as a tenured Assistant Professor), United Kingdom (as a PhD student) and Germany (as a post-doctoral researcher) there have been moments when I was guilty of feeling such self-righteousness.

However, since “the canon of thought in all the disciplines of the Social Sciences and Humanities in the *Westernized university*...is based on the knowledge produced by a few men in five countries in the Western Europe,”² it is difficult to sustain such a sense if you are an academic from a different context. After reading reams and reams of critical theory that elaborates the possibilities for challenging

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1 Jokes that circulate around about the presence of a food chain in the university system within which the Dean has the ability to give “policy to God,” the Associate Professor can occasionally be addressed by God whereas the instructor has to pray a lot (Bronner 2012, 88) can be used to understand the power structures within this system. If we take into account the broader functioning of global academia in the humanities and social sciences, this food chain will be far more elaborate. For example, it is possible for white academics from the Global North to form all-white research groups with funding of a couple of millions to study precarious communities within authoritarian contexts in the Global South. Within the Global South itself, there are considerable inequalities in terms of access to research funding and the cultural and social capital that can lead to ‘significant academic contributions’ in terms of monographs or journal articles. Within such food chains, those in the lower orders fuel the success of those above them. The so-called ‘research subjects’ who serve as the material for study for academics within various levels of the hierarchy of the food chain can be situated at the bottom of this chain.

2 Grosfoguel 2013, 74.

existing hegemonies – mostly written by dead or alive white people – one could wonder, like Hamid Dabashi (2013), whether non-Europeans can think.

At the same time, even when one positions oneself as a researcher from the Global South,³ it is not easy to throw stones at the system when one works within the glass houses of academia. The power structures that confer the stature of knowledge⁴ to academic productions are not monolithic. For example, in India, the westernised university is also a site of upper caste privilege. Similarly, class functions as another important factor in determining the hierarchies of academia in many parts of the world. Apart from such obvious inequalities, one also needs to take into account the “epistemic racism/sexism that is foundational to the knowledge structures of the westernised university,”⁵ while ascertaining the privileges it confers to people from certain backgrounds. As scholars like Grosfoguel (2013) point out, the emergence of this form of university is tied to the silencing of other voices through the genocides and epistemicides of the long 16th century against native Americans and indigenous people of Asia, Jews and Muslims during the conquest of Al Andalus, Africans who were transported as slaves and European women who were burnt alive as witches.

So, anybody who operates as an academic within the framework of the westernised university is functioning within terrains which can pose far more dilemmas than the bureaucratic processes of ethical clearances acknowledge. As an academic from India, I have always found it difficult to negotiate these terrains. In order to move up within the academic food chain, one needs to wade through the sharp edges of peer reviews and appraisals where the rules of the game are already set. There is a need to cite theorists with good brand value and respectable citation indexes. While Europeans have the privilege of not reading theory that comes from other lifeworlds and perspectives,⁶ researchers from the Global South cannot afford a similar ignorance of the haloed white men of academia. I am sure that there must be ways of negotiating these terrains through path-breaking modes and tactics of resistance. A range of feminist, queer, indigenous and black scholars have shown the possibilities for such resistance.

But, not everyone who operates within unequal and unjust structures will have the capacity or frame of mind to go in for radical confrontations. As an early

³ According to the rules of academia that insist on precise definitions of not very easily definable terms, I would like to state that I use the term ‘Global South’ with an awareness of the contentions around the use of the term. Molosi-France and Makoni 2020.

⁴ Foucault 1980.

⁵ Grosfoguel 2013, 73.

⁶ Dabashi 2015.

career researcher who has a pretty low position in the academic food chain, I am certainly not good with such confrontations. My feeble efforts to point out the whiteness of academic structures often slide into heated arguments about problems of essentialist claims around ethnicity.

I have many white friends. white, black, yellow, brown...all are constructions. BUT CAN WE HAVE LESS OF MONOCHROME AND PENISES IN PLACES OF POWER?

Due to my inability to look for ways of radically interrogating the power structures of academia within which I was also operating with the privileges of a middle-class background, I needed a different approach to tackle the dilemmas around my own role within the so called ‘production of knowledge’ at the westernised university. This led me to explore the possibility of approaching the field of academic production as a *tamasha*.⁷ In South Asia, the word *tamasha* has several meanings, ranging from joke to entertainment and commotion. Perceiving an activity or incident as a *tamasha* brings that activity or incident to the realm of the non-serious, in which the participants or onlookers act with a sense of ridiculousness about their own role.⁸ While some events are designed to be a *tamasha*, it is also possible to turn almost anything into a *tamasha*. For example, it is not uncommon to refer to an election or a government initiative as a *tamasha*.⁹ Such references signal that these activities and endeavours have entered the plane of the ridiculous.

It is possible to use *tamasha* as a conceptual framework to respond to seemingly invisible power structures.¹⁰ For example, in colonial India, local populations responded to the staging of spectacles of science by the colonial government which were intended to awe them by treating them as *tamasha*.¹¹ The representatives of the colonial government were dismayed by this approach. The effort to narrate the superiority of the colonial power through spectacles that showed the command of these powers over science did not have the intended outcome because the local population chose the frame of *tamasha* to respond to them. So, if the frame of *tamasha*, which draws from its multiple meanings in the South Asian context, including joke, commotion, and entertainment, can be useful to negotiate everyday life within the sharp edges of diverse power structures, how can one employ it to function within the field of academia?

7 Nizaruddin 2017.

8 Ibid.

9 Siddiqui 2021.

10 Nizaruddin 2017.

11 Prakash 1999.

Participating in Academic *Tamasha*

Before exploring specific ways of using *tamasha* to negotiate the tricky terrains of academia, it might be useful to outline some of the rocky edges of its terrains. On the surface, it might appear that academics across the world have equal chances of rising up within the food chain of academia through ‘rigour’, ‘hard work’, ‘talent’ and ‘pathbreaking ideas’. However, this assumption is only as true as the statement that any actor in the world can become a star in Hollywood or Bollywood. The process of making academic stars with enviable citation indexes is a complex one which requires all kinds of capital, ranging from academic, social and cultural capital to economic capital.¹² As Moran points out, elite institutions have the capital required for such construction and maintenance of academic stardom. This kind of construction of academic stars also depletes already scarce resources that are available to the non-stars, early career researchers as well as those in precarious non-tenured positions. The situation becomes more complex for academics who work and live in the Global South. The star-making networks that do the alchemy of producing ‘eminent philosophers’ who apparently disrupt “ideological structures”¹³ generally wine and dine in the Global North.

Of course, there are star academics who are located in the Global South as well, though they are considerably fewer. And you can argue that, as an early career researcher, one should pursue the muse of knowledge instead of being resentful towards star academics. But, within the existing food chain of academia, the gold standard of citation index ensures that early career researchers cannot ignore the fact that more established and well known researchers get the resources, time and publishing contracts that are needed for what gets counted as ‘quality research.’ It is the age-old problem; you need capital in the first place to build more capital – be it academic, social or cultural capital.

So, as a lowly early career researcher who resented needing to cite X, Y and Z, who have already said whatever has to be said about anything in her discipline, I began to use the frame of *tamasha* to operate within the field of academia. This framework was immensely useful in several circumstances including the following: (a) while attending conferences where speakers talked about how humour began in Greece; (b) when feeling the secret desire to burn the library down while browsing through the books on documentary theory (my field of study), which hardly ever mentioned India though the country was home to an institution that was at one time considered to be the largest documentary produ-

¹² Moran 1998.

¹³ Zabala 2012.

cer in the world;¹⁴ or (c) while feeling the need to chase down the peer reviewer who wrote that my work was too South-Asia-centric to be of any relevance to discussions about digital media.

Also, in the publish or perish world of academia, to pass through the needle eye of peer review processes, one has to cite at least some of the venerable white men. So in the spirit of *tamasha* I used to cite a few while trying to smuggle in a few others who did not belong to the list of usual suspects who needed to be cited in my field of research. Being an artistic researcher also helped because the less dogmatic research structures around this mode of research allowed me to ridicule the need to cite Rancière in a work about film and anti-nuclear resistance in Tamil Nadu, even though I had to cite the grand old man (or someone similar) to make my work appear ‘scholarly’ enough.¹⁵ However, approaching anything, including the field of academia as a *tamasha*, comes with its limitations. Situating oneself as a participant in a *tamasha* may not bring any radical changes to the existing power structures. But, approaching academia as a *tamasha* allowed me to operate within a system which produced erudite analyses of strategies of resistance and subversion without paying much attention to the structures of exploitation and hierarchy through which such analyses gains the stature of scholarly contribution. I was also an active participant within such structures; I insisted on ‘rigour’ whenever I was in a gatekeeping position, without taking into account the severe inequalities that allowed those with a range of privileged positions – including class, racial or caste backgrounds – to set the so-called standards around ‘rigour’. But, like many participants in any *tamasha*, I was functioning within the structures of academia with an amount of self-derision.¹⁶ However, this mode of functioning definitely has its limits. Personally, I encountered the limits of framing my role as a participant in a *tamasha* while trying to function as an academic in India under the authoritarian rule of Modi, the current Prime Minister of the right wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, which subscribes to the Hindutva ideology of Hindu majoritarianism.¹⁷

14 Battaglia 2014.

15 Nizaruddin 2017.

16 Ibid.

17 The peer reviewer of this chapter – who was kind, a rarity among (anonymous) peer reviewers – suggested that I should expand the arguments made here by drawing from the authoritarian experiences in other parts of South Asia, such as Pakistan. Since I have no lived experience of these contexts, I have limited myself here to the context of authoritarianism in India that I have had the misfortune to experience.

Authoritarianism and the Limits of Participating in the Academic *Tamasha*

Even while acknowledging the structural inequalities that are part of the present mode of functioning of the academia, one cannot discount the importance of academic understanding in acquiring informed insights about various phenomena or social processes. Academic freedom is crucial for gaining such insights. While there is a need for a clearer definition of academic freedom, it is possible to argue that the current rise of authoritarianism in many parts of the world has undermined this freedom in several contexts.¹⁸ In the case of India, several universities became key targets of attack by actors with ties to the regime in power; many of these universities also became sites of resistance against such attacks. The university where I used to teach, Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi, became one of the epicentres of protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) introduced by the Modi government. This legislation, which can be used to discriminate against Muslims, met with stiff opposition in several parts of the country. In the case of Jamia Millia Islamia, responses to protest included a police attack on students¹⁹ as well as an incident in which a right-wing gun man fired at and injured a student in full police presence.²⁰

For me personally, these incidents showed the limits of the framework of *tamasha*. While making an academic response to the incidents unfurling around me through an article,²¹ I could no longer look at my work as a participation in a *tamasha*. It is difficult to use the framework of *tamasha* when your students are being tear-gassed, beaten up or detained, when your library is being destroyed,²² when you are worried about the draconian antiterrorism law that is floating through the campus looking for its next victim,²³ when right-wing goons kill with impunity as parts of your city burn in what gets termed ‘Hindu-Muslim riots.’²⁴ At the same time, the turmoil around me in a country which is now considered ‘partly free’²⁵ was not the only factor that made me realise the limits of the frame-

18 Bhatta and Sundar 2020.

19 Nitika 2020.

20 Sundaram 2020.

21 Nizaruddin 2020.

22 Shankar 2020.

23 *Scroll* Staff 2020.

24 Ellis-Petersen 2020.

25 Freedom House 2021.

work of *tamasha*.²⁶ The already skewed landscape of academic knowledge production in many disciplines, where research produced by academics from a few countries dominates²⁷ because of the concentration of resources and networks, could worsen with the deepening of authoritarianism in places like India. Arghavan et al. have written about how “[m]arginalized people of color from the Global South serve white academics as interesting objects of study to form a research group”²⁸; pointing out that funds from such projects generally provide employment to white scholars. Within these structures, certain populations become ‘objects’ of study without much of a role in deciding the nature, parameters and processes of such studies.

Hey, race is a fiction. NEANDERTHAL, MAYBE THAT IS ANOTHER RACE? “YES, YES. but like most fictions, it sticks to the skin and makes one pay with pain in many currencies”

At the same time, though phenomena like “Yale University’s all-white department of black studies,” which Paul Beatty (2015) draws up in his brilliant novel *The Sellout*, are not unusual within the very unequal terrains of academia, race or nationality are not the only positions of advantage in these terrains. As mentioned before, the very nature of academia, which privileges those with academic capital – often linked with economic, social, or cultural capital – excludes many marginalised groups who are often topics for examination for scholars from more privileged backgrounds. I have also benefitted from my privileges as a middle-class person whose parents were college teachers and have paid many bills with the money I earned from the categorisation of tears and resistance of precarious communities on the edge. However, an understanding of my own culpability within the power structures of academia did not prevent me from being extremely resentful when the tables were turned. Academics who are located in the Global South are often important entry points for what can be categorised as researcher tourists who arrive from the Global North. These researcher tourists, with access to funding that is very difficult to raise in authoritarian contexts for critical research, arrive with an intention to sieve out ‘resistance’ from extremely complex and violent lived realities. In a short time span they try to mine for ‘resistance;’ with the hope of turning such ‘resistance’ into the gold of highly citable

²⁶ While India as a country was classified as partly free recently, people in several parts that are administered by the Indian state, such as Kashmir, have been living under severe repression for decades. Kazi 2009.

²⁷ Wolhuter 2017.

²⁸ Arghavan, Hirschfelder and Motyl 2019, 187.

published academic outputs.²⁹ Many colleagues from the Global South often complain about their encounters with such mining efforts and my own brushes with similar efforts have significantly increased the average level of grudge that I hold against the world.³⁰ Under the present authoritarian context in India, I was unable to situate such encounters as a part of the academic *tamasha* in which I continue to be a participant.

The manner in which misery in one part of the world fuels the career growth of researchers in another part is certainly not a new phenomenon, and the existing inequalities within the field of academia are largely responsible for the creation and sustenance of such positions. It is convenient to imagine that academic research is born of the toils of the lone genius who single-mindedly pursues fieldwork and toils in archives or libraries to produce ‘new knowledge.’ In reality, the process of production of such knowledge requires research grants and time off from teaching responsibilities as well as personal circumstances that provide the time and energy to brave the various gatekeeping mechanisms of academia. The manner in which this process produces more male geniuses and creates roadblocks for women has been studied.³¹ Apart from women, this process has the ability to sieve out a range of varying degrees of marginal positions. Academics who are located in the Global South generally have considerably less access to resources and networks that are essential to rising up within the food chain of academia by playing the citation index game with precision. However, even within the Global South, there are severe disparities between academics who work in more established universities and those who work in colleges with scant resources. In India, I used to belong to that privileged group of academics who have a tenured position as well as a certain degree of mobility to access resources and networks that are essential to stay relevant within the citation game. My position within a central university in Delhi was far different from that of many other colleagues. Some of them teach thirty contact hours a week as the only teacher in departments in remote border towns, while others work in private universities where their classes are recorded and watched by the management.

²⁹ These time spans can often be linked with academic calendars. For example, in the context of Bosnia, Damir Arsenijevic (in a personal conversation with me in 2022) mentions about how anthropologists are in bloom in June.

³⁰ On the other hand, it is also possible to look at most efforts at research – including my own – as efforts at mining for the elusive academic ‘excellence’ that is measured through citation indexes.

³¹ Steinþórsdóttir et al. 2020.

Who has the privilege to write?

But, being able to write itself is a privilege.

and, those who write and are cited, they earned it through centuries or even thousands of years of 'hard work'

Amidst so many layers of inequality that are part of the academic terrain, in India, the targeting of university spaces, academic communities and individual academics³² under the present regime creates yet another factor that deepens existing divisions. In India, the existing meagre funding for humanities research comes mainly from state funding. In circumstances where the majoritarian Hindu-tva ideology that informs the group of organisations under the fold of Sangh Parivar including BJP – the current ruling party – poses a serious threat to academic freedom, securing grants from government agencies to study the implications of majoritarianism is almost impossible. The way in which funding cuts threaten the existence of centres for women's studies as well as studies on social exclusion³³ shows the difficulty of producing academic work under the current circumstances. Bhatta and Sunder (2020) have demonstrated how the agenda of cultural transformation of Sangh Parivar groups such as RSS (*Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh*)³⁴ make certain university spaces their specific targets.

But, there is still hope. With the jails being more open than the doors of research funds, someone might come up with prison notebooks that can rival Gramsci's.

While physical attacks and imprisonment that targets students and academics are easier to perceive, there is also within the country a simultaneous stifling of the research landscape that seriously affects the ability of scholars, especially early career researchers and students, to produce work that can rise up within the global academic food chain. As mentioned before, this can further increase the existing inequalities within global academia. Personally, these circumstances made me realise that this shrinking of the research landscape around me can also curtail my ability to approach my work as an academic as a *tamasha*. When the

³² Bhatta and Sunder 2020.

³³ Sharma 2017; Bhuyan 2019.

³⁴ RSS, which is the main organisation within the Sangh Parivar group, has links with fascist and Nazi ideologies (Leidig 2020). As mentioned earlier, the ruling BJP is a part of the Sangh Parivar network. For an account of how RSS functions as a deep state within the rule of Modi see Chatterji et al. 2019.

already limited scope of functioning as an early career researcher located in the Global South is further threatened by the spectre of authoritarianism, the space of manoeuvre that is required to take on the position of one who participates in a *tamasha* disappears; at least that was my experience. Here again, not all academics face the same scale of limitations. I was able to get a postdoctoral fellowship from a German foundation for more than two years, which allowed me to pursue my research interests at a department at a German university and a research centre in India; both places provided me with very supportive and inspiring environments. However, such privileges are accessible only to very few researchers in India. I continue to wonder about how many of the students and academics that I have encountered, who resist the rising tide of authoritarianism and majoritarian violence in the country at great personal costs, will be part of the writing of academic discourses about such resistances. It is highly likely that profitable academic output about such resistance will be authored by researcher tourists from the Global North with access to more resources and capital.³⁵

The Way Forward

So, while the framework of *tamasha* might be useful at certain junctures to navigate the unequal structures of global academia, the limits of this framework can be easily stretched in several circumstances including under authoritarian contexts. There is a need to address the roots of such structural inequalities with the same precision with which academics do hairsplitting around various theories and approaches within their disciplines. Maybe instead of keynote speeches in conferences by fat cat theorists who seem to know the last word on everything that needs to be said (and they often do not live in the contexts that they speak about), there is a need to listen to students who are located in the terrains that they speak from.³⁶ Of course, such gestures will only be symbolic and they will not change the fundamental structural problems within academia.

³⁵ Here it is not my intention to locate every researcher from the Global North as a researcher tourist who works within what can be characterised as an extractive paradigm. There are several examples of solidarities and collaboration across borders. *The Wire* Staff 2019.

³⁶ Within academic penchant for hairsplitting, this could be seen as a romanticization of people who are located within certain contexts. Such romanticization is not the intention here because that can limit the mobility of scholars who are located outside the usual lifeworlds from which academia generally draws its 'experts.'

Addressing such fundamental problems is all the more important when faced with the spectre of authoritarianism because the global and interconnected nature of academia can work against the efforts of authoritarian regimes to violently curtail possible expressions around specific issues and topics. For example, the project of BJP and the larger Sangh Parivar group of organisations, which includes efforts to rewrite the history of India to suit their ideas of a glorious Hindu majoritarian past,³⁷ will continue to be difficult at a global scale because it will be impossible to gain consensus from historians across the world for this project.

There are several examples of academics in various disciplines who build solidarities across borders to navigate difficult working conditions.³⁸ However, the compulsions of the neoliberal university make such solidarities difficult. As Gudavarthy (2019) points out in the context of secularism and ethnic conflict in India, it is difficult to carve out solidarities when you are competing with each other in the neoliberal order. For example, while scholars located within authoritarian contexts might be struggling with the limitations posed by the environment around them, other scholars who are positioned in what could be seen as greener pastures of academia in the Global North are struggling with precarity in jobs and limited contracts. The neoliberal university structure and the food chain hierarchies within academia places both sets of scholars in competition with each other for very scarce resources.

While the question of solidarity is always a tricky one, given the power imbalances inherent within frameworks of solidarity,³⁹ there is scope for academics across the world to work together to deal with many issues including the threat from authoritarianism. However, any genuine solidarity will require a serious rethinking of academic structures that give preferences to those who come from various kinds of privileged backgrounds. While there is enough talk (and generally little action as in the case of climate change) about the need to disinvest in academia from heterosexual white male geniuses, whiteness or one's gender are not the only layers of privilege within the academia. Class and caste differences, as well as hierarchies within specific societies, have serious implications in deciding who emerges as a 'serious' academic within the food chain. Unless there are genuine efforts to address these structural inequalities and precarity within academia at a global scale, the only option for many academics will be to operate as participants in a *tamasha* within the existing power structures. And the spectre of

³⁷ Sarkar 2019.

³⁸ Schneider and Chaudhuri 2021.

³⁹ Sözen 2021.

the rising trend of authoritarianism in many parts of the world can unsettle even such limited frameworks like that of the *tamasha*.

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Abida Bano

Hegemony and Decolonising Research Praxis

A Researcher's Journey in the Peripheries of Pakistan

Introduction

British colonisation has significantly damaged South Asian cultures, languages, and religions. In the Indian subcontinent, at the expense of local knowledge systems, the British Empire created an alternative (with the English language at the centre) to promote the empire's global expansion. Macaulay's *Minutes on Education* (1835) declared the indigenous knowledges of the Indian subcontinent as useless for British rule and its colonial governance system; thus, the English education system had to replace the local systems of learning to achieve the empire's objectives. Taking on the British empire's deliberate actions to forcefully homogenise the diverse cultures, religions, languages and ethnicities in India, Mubarak Ali notes that Macaulay's speech eliminated the salience of indigenous knowledges to promote British corporate and economic interests.¹ Under British rule, the job market required English as a lingua franca, undermining the importance of learning the local languages of Persian and Sanskrit. Persian remained the court language in India well into the 18th century but was eventually replaced with English. Henceforth, the hierarchy of Western knowledge was set discursively since it was the only way to get a job.² To foster the development of Britain, indigenous knowledge systems were substituted with those colonial rulers thought could achieve the empire's economic and political objectives.

Since research methodologies are tools for knowledge production, it is crucial to understand how colonial knowledge systems perpetrated and maintained the hegemony of Western epistemologies and research methodologies and continue to do so. Despite achieving political independence in 1947, the Western education system persists across the independent states of British India (including pre-1947 Pakistan and India). Subsequently, Talbot notes that colonial legacies are consistently present as critical discourses and practices in Pakistan's institutional

1 Ali 2017, 16.

2 Ibid.

and cultural orders.³ Thus, hegemonic colonial practices are perpetuated in education and research without much scrutiny.

State of the art on decolonising research methodology(/-ies) theorises significant obstacles, puzzles, and coping methods beyond a toolbox approach in developing critical knowledge production. Proponents aim to build more egalitarian, non-hegemonic, and inclusive research tools to be shared between partners from the global North and South. According to Santos, capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy – which function in unison and asymmetrically – are the current forms of dominance.⁴ As the academic system becomes more and more neoliberal, it renders the colonial past and patriarchal authority within the university and other sites of knowledge creation even more apparent. The continuity of hierarchical structures and hegemonic research practices in universities demonstrates that an anti-imperial global South is distant, if not impossible. In addition, it is true that, in attempting decolonisation, we struggle to see beyond our fields’ ‘hegemonic eye.’⁵ Many who are part of global South academia and have received training in the Western education systems can hardly see past the Western research principles. However, Keet suggests that by placing epistemic justice at the centre to disrupt disciplines, critical questions must be asked to challenge the hegemonic Western discourses on knowledge creation and research and make innovation possible.⁶

The endeavour of decolonisation began as an anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and anti-hegemonic resistance movement.⁷ More specifically, decolonising knowledge production aims to undo the “epistemic violence”⁸ caused by the colonialism project, ending the dominance of Western epistemologies and revitalising the local institutions and knowledge-production sites – delegitimised and deprived of their rights. Moreover, these approaches undermine the Western conceptions of scientific, objective, and rational knowledge and question the dominant research practices in post-colonial contexts. In addition to recognising cultural sensitivities and subjectivities, they place the researcher and research participants (knowledge co-producers) at the centre of the process. The decolonising discourses hold that everyone constructs meaning regardless of their social place.⁹

³ Talbot 2013, 29.

⁴ Santos 2018, 212.

⁵ Santos 2014, 3.

⁶ Keet 2014, 23.

⁷ Maldonado-Torres 2006.

⁸ Darder 2018, 94.

⁹ Darder 2018.

Problematising (neo-)colonial research norms and practices, this chapter illustrates the hegemonic research practices in Pakistani academia and how they affect young early-career scholars' ability to produce locally pertinent knowledge that benefits society.¹⁰ It also describes how the dominant power structures in 'peripheral' Pakistani academia promote neo-colonial practices while marginalising the researcher and maintaining Western epistemic supremacy. Theoretically, this chapter advances our understanding of repressive practices in Pakistani universities and the beyond-the-toolbox approach to responding to such issues.¹¹ There is not much written on the oppressive practices and behaviours that early career researchers and academics encounter at universities in the peripheral regions of Pakistan. I underscore how the senior-junior divide and bureaucratic research bodies interfere with academic freedom in teaching and research.¹² In addition, the relationship between native/local and diaspora researchers, insiders in differing degrees (positionality politics), and how male researchers problematise/challenge Western research ethics during fieldwork in the turbulent Pashtun¹³ areas are also concerns of this chapter.

Positionality(s) and Context

Most of the experiences centred in this chapter occurred in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a peripheral province of Pakistan. Situated in the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderlands, Pashtun areas have borne the brunt of the ongoing war on terror since the 9/11 attacks, enhancing myriad challenges for its people and society. Historically, the state of Pakistan had been reluctant to grant provincial autonomy; therefore, there is an uneasy relationship between the centre and peripheral provinces.¹⁴

10 See also Fleschenberg 2023.

11 See also the special issue "Negotiating Research Ethics in Volatile Contexts" (2022/2023), guest-edited by Abida Bano, Rosa Cordillera Castillo, Sarah Holz and Andrea Fleschenberg, with case studies from Pakistan (Holz and Bano 2022 as well as Huang 2022), Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Turkey, and work on colonial archives with/on the Philippines.

12 See for some insights from early career researchers the forum "Review Essays, Part 1: Researching in Times of a Pandemic" (Batool et al. 2021, Fleschenberg and Holz 2021, Kalia 2021, Khan 2021 and Zuberi 2021).

13 Pashtun refers to the ethnic group dwelling around the Pak-Afghan border. Most Pashtun enjoyed autonomous or semi-autonomous status under British rule.

14 Leake 2016. After the 18th amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, provincial autonomy was enhanced but the power struggle between the centre and provinces also increased. As a re-

Socio-economic inequalities and regional disparities characterise the Pakistani federal system. Some ethnic-nationalist voices from peripheral provinces have been contesting the inequitable distribution of resources among the regions and growing regional differences. However, the state does not welcome such contestation; thus, studying dissident movements is an understudied subject in mainstream academia in Pakistan. Furthermore, the academic community also mirrors geographic-cum-sociopolitical differences across regions and ethnic groups. The urbanised suburbs of Punjab, the capital – Islamabad, and metropolitan Karachi are home to the ‘elite’ academic community; those residing in the peripheral regions are the intellectual ‘others,’ considered of lower ranks. Another factor adding to the elitism of the privileged ‘academics located in central locations’ is that they are closely connected with the academics and researchers in the global North. In some instances, they work in the global North institutions (diaspora academics) and place themselves above the ones residing and working in Pakistan—one of the vignettes details such an incident. Being dismissed and looked down upon by diaspora academics relocated in the global North is not uncommon, and many could relate to this experience. Therefore, positionality(s) is (are) critical to the researcher’s experiences in this chapter. My positionalities range from an educated ethnic Pashtun woman (insider) to someone who is educated/graduated from a global North university working in a public sector university in the periphery of Pakistan. I faced several challenges, from a graduate student to an early career researcher, during my research journey. I used various coping strategies to overcome those challenges, including negotiations, going along, and doing research sideways¹⁵ for the reflections and explorations that followed.

sult, in terms of how Pakistan’s resources and power are distributed, the Pashtun areas (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) lie on the periphery. Furthermore, under the 31st amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, ex-FATA became a regular part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2018. However, there is still a long way to go before the merged districts (the new nomenclature for the former FATA) are mainstreamed due to impeding factors such as poverty, illiteracy, militancy, and terrorism. Ex-FATA was a semi-autonomous region governed by the British Law Frontier Crimes Regulation 1901 (FCR) until as late as 2018. Ahmad 2020.

15 See for a discussion of researching sideways Fleschenberg 2023.

Research Techniques Used: Reflexivity as Decolonising Research Method

In this chapter, I use reflexivity to narrate my interactions as a researcher in diverse research environments. I use a free-flowing approach to capture the rich details of events and the field settings where these interactions occurred. Each vignette highlights a problem associated with producing locally grounded knowledge that is contextually rigorous. Providing examples of decolonised research procedures is challenging because decolonising scholars have yet to suggest a particular research design. Still, they preferred some methods over others, including reflexive grounded theory, and scholarship needs to provide a strategy for decolonising research. However, one method the scholars have used is researchers' reflexivity for drawing attention to and confronting the coloniality and hegemony of Western research praxis.¹⁶ The researcher's reflexivity emphasises active participation in the research process.

As a decolonising research technique, I chose reflexivity for collecting experiences that iteratively shape the trajectory of my research career. Being a researcher is a continuous process of evolving, developing, and changing identities. As Etherington puts it, reflexivity "empowers a researcher to convey the tale of her 'becoming' rather than how she has become."¹⁷ Additionally, reflexivity focuses on intersubjectivity, knowledge colonisation, and ontological, epistemological, and axiological aspects of the self.¹⁸

Though defining reflexivity has its challenges,¹⁹ it is pivotal to feminist research,²⁰ crucial to participatory action research,²¹ and significant to post-structural approaches, ethnography, and hermeneutics.²² Initially, Gouldner defined reflexivity as a tool for analysing the researcher's role in qualitative research.²³ However, with the development of narrative approaches in qualitative research, reflexivity captures more than what is initially conceived. It demands the researcher to go beyond 'looking good'²⁴ and continue self-critique²⁵ and self-

16 See Russell-Mundine 2012.

17 Etherington 2004, 15.

18 Berger 2015.

19 Colbourne and Sque 2004.

20 King 1994.

21 Robertson 2000.

22 Koch and Harrington 1998.

23 Gouldner 1971.

24 Furman 2004.

25 Dowling 2006.

inspection.²⁶ Personal reflexivity is a moment of “self-awareness,”²⁷ wherein a researcher must acknowledge her relationship to the research process and the participants in the research.²⁸ While conducting research, a researcher remains in the moment at multiple levels (personally and epistemologically), acknowledging the intersubjectivity of the research environment.

I use reflexivity to connect with research actively to unearth deep-seated hegemonic research practices across the Pakistani academic environment in peripheral universities. I use it as an effective research technique that allows me to tell my story alongside the research participants while completing the research process. Reflexivity is a researcher’s active involvement in the research process.²⁹ It also introduces autoethnography, a genre of autobiographical writing and study that emphasises the self and process while connecting the personal and the cultural.³⁰ Also, scholars have identified reflexivity as one of the methods to decolonise research discourses.³¹ In this chapter, I have used reflexivity as a decolonising method to profoundly communicate with my research environment and identify the underlying hegemony of research praxis in the peripheral Pakistani academia. This chapter contains reflexive accounts of this researcher, along with one interview with a male researcher. Hence, I use reflexivity as the primary research method in this chapter. In addition, I have engaged the interview method in one vignette to bring in a male perspective on the hegemonic research practices in the peripheral academia in Pakistan.

The reflexivity approach is constant throughout the chapter except for the last vignette, which features an in-depth interview (IDI) with a male researcher who conducted his research in the same social settings.³² In the interview, I actively listened to the male researcher. At the same time, he shared his reflexivity experiences during his fieldwork in the conflict-sensitive settings of North-western Pakistan. This interview is salient to show the different research approaches of male and female researchers, their diverse research experiences and the conceptual insights regarding research praxis in the volatile context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

26 Colbourne and Sque 2004.

27 Giddens 2013, 22.

28 Horsburgh 2003.

29 Finlay 2002.

30 Ellis and Bochner 2000.

31 See Russell-Mundine 2020; Rhee 2020.

32 Researcher interviews allow scholars to benefit from the experience of other researchers working in a similar field and to fill gaps in research practice or underexplored research areas. I used a reflexive approach in this interview to account for the interviewee’s subjectivities and identity as conceptual insights of his research practice. See Denzin 2001; Bryman and Cassel 2006.

During the interview, the participant was urged to reflect on his research practice, constraints, and opportunities and reflect on the research craft.³³ To acknowledge the subjectivity and identity of the researcher and research process, both research techniques – reflexivity and IDI challenge the hegemony of colonial research praxis and attempt to decentre research methodologies.

Theoretical Connections

Decolonisation attempts to undo the sociocultural engineering that maintains the colonial project, upholding the authority of Western discourses in post-colonial nations. Decolonisation must occur because, as Mignolo rightly points out, colonialism has not ended yet; instead, it has taken new forms.³⁴ Tuihawai Smith sees “decolonisation as releasing from being a colony, granting independence.”³⁵ Additionally, it continually honours indigenous epistemologies, peoples, voices, lands, and sovereignty over the process.³⁶ Similarly, Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls out the global North’s “epistemicide”³⁷ in the global South, urging the global South to develop alternative epistemologies with intercultural translations.

Decolonising research discourse is premised on the assertion that knowledge and power are co-constitutive, where leverage creates the knowledge to govern and rule.³⁸ Research and methodologies claim to produce objective and accurate knowledge. In the epistemically colonised world, the global South has often been updated about what constitutes “real knowledge, reason, and science.”³⁹ It is important to emphasise that the global South is not a geographical term; instead, it is a symbolic allegory referring to the places on the world map that have suffered coloniality and continue to exist under the colonial matrix of power.⁴⁰ ‘Global South’ has become an alternative term for underdevelopment, referring to a long history of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and various socioeconomic transformations that maintain disparities in living conditions and resource availability.⁴¹

33 Bryman and Cassel 2006.

34 Mignolo 2007.

35 Smith 2021, 13.

36 Denzin et al. 2008.

37 Santos 2014, 94.

38 Foucault and Gordon 1980.

39 Mitova 2020, 196.

40 Mignolo 2007.

41 Dado and Conell 2012.

Santos expands on the idea by referring to the global South as a collection of places, people, and other creatures harmed by capitalism, colonialism, and the insatiable appetite for patriarchy,⁴² the global South has become the focal point of the intellectual struggle against brutality and epistemic erasures committed by Western imperialism and colonialism.

Our frameworks and modes of existence as academics – how we go about being, speaking, listening, knowing, interacting, and seeing – have roots in Euro-American ideals informed by Western knowledge systems.⁴³ According to Mignolo,⁴⁴ there are many different types of coloniality, one of which is the coloniality of knowledge, which upholds the dominance of Western knowledge systems over other knowledge systems worldwide. As a result, even after the formal end of colonial rule, the epistemic hegemony of colonial discourse keeps colonial modes of dominance in place.⁴⁵ Therefore, the ‘scientific’ knowledge generated in and through Western knowledge systems permeates postcolonial knowledge-production sites—research in the West centres notions of scientific objectivity with colonial overtones. Decolonising knowledge production is centred on the drive to correct research-related infractions and regain control of knowledge production, becoming the knowledge contributors. However, this cannot be accomplished without decolonising research techniques.

The epistemic decolonial turn⁴⁶ aims at decolonising the Western canon and epistemology. According to Chiumbu, it can be challenging to illustrate decolonising research.⁴⁷ How is knowledge produced? Who helped create it? Is it useful? What is the relationship between knowledge and its producers? These questions are at the core of the “epistemic decolonial turn.”⁴⁸ Decolonising research approaches exhort us to consider the positionalities of the researcher to the research participants and the “geopolitics of knowledge”⁴⁹ as a whole. The decolonising discourse is a protest against the persisting epistemicide in the global South.⁵⁰ Although decolonising methodologies is not a political strategy of revolution, it does stimulate some revolutionary thought about the roles that

42 Santos 2014.

43 Chiumbu 2017.

44 Mignolo 2007.

45 Grosfoguel 2007.

46 Chiumbu quoting Grosfoguel 2007, 1.

47 Chiumbu 2017.

48 Chiumbu 2017, 1.

49 The phrase is Mignolo’s 2005.

50 Santos 2014, 1.

knowledge, knowledge production, knowledge hierarchies, and knowledge institutions play in colonialism and social transformation.⁵¹

In the following two vignettes, drawing on the theoretical perspectives mentioned above, I direct attention to the lack of academic freedom in peripheral academia in Pakistan. In the public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the hegemonic role of research boards and the bureaucratic divide between junior and senior faculty members at the departmental level and in interdepartmental relationships testify to the continuous presence of colonial research praxis. These factors are supported by patriarchal expectations that a female academic should be ‘polite, submissive, and ladylike’ (read: unassertive, without agency) at workplaces. Academic freedom is a broad concept with several definitions, including the total autonomy of the institution and academics regarding what they teach, how they teach it, and what the research topics should be.⁵² I operationalise academic freedom as the capability of an academic (professor) to design and provide courses about their area of concentration, supervise students who share their research interests, and select which courses to teach and what research agenda to pursue.

A Junior Female Academic: Another ‘Other’

According to Fakhri,⁵³ the most educated men in academia are not immune to gender blindness. Despite their higher qualifications and working in the relatively liberal spaces of Pakistan’s universities, most senior male professors hold on to the traditional patriarchal and hierarchal workplace practices. One of the gender-biased practices in the peripheral academia in Pakistan is to treat women academics and researchers as ‘juniors’ despite having similar or better credentials than their male counterparts. The senior-junior divide is used as a form of domination (patriarchal and colonial) that drives a wedge amongst staff members and negatively impacts the young female academics emotionally and professionally. It is important to note that the senior-junior divide also affects male junior researchers. However, it is worse for a female junior. In this chapter, ‘junior’ refers to the academic ‘other’ who is underrepresented, marginalised, and often erased from decision-making in research bodies for being female and early career. They

⁵¹ Smith 1999.

⁵² See Anand and Niaz 2022; Marginson 2014; Maldonado-Torres 2011; Albatch 2001.

⁵³ Fakhri 2018.

are placed lower in the hierarchical division between faculty members. Seniority, on the other hand, refers to the unique advantages that a person (mostly male) in academia has over others (according to title, gender, age, and longevity of service). Interacting with a senior male colleague made me realise that these restrictive and retrogressive senior-junior practices curtail female academics' and researchers' academic freedom. Academic freedom is salient to producing contextual decolonised knowledge.

It is usual to choose courses to teach from a pre-approved course catalogue in the public sector universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However, it is a norm that seniors pick up their courses first. Once, during a staff meeting to discuss course allocation, I picked up a graduate course on research methodology for the forthcoming semester. Because I have a deep interest and specialised training in research methods courses, I occasionally prefer to teach a methods course. A few days later, a senior male professor approached me, asking me to drop that course since he wanted to teach it. He asked me to refrain from teaching research methods courses to any programme because they are reserved for him. He clarified that since he had previously taught research methodologies, he could do it comfortably and with little preparation. Besides, he stated it is the prerogative of the 'seniors' to choose courses they like. I felt disturbed by his communication style, which was dominating and condescending. I tried keeping my composure and told him that he could have informed us before the meeting about his interest, and it would have worked out well (he had missed the course allocation meeting). This conversation happened in the tearoom, where we take breaks after classes. It is important to note that before asking me about not teaching the methods courses, he requested other colleagues to leave the tearoom since he wanted to talk to me alone. His body language, facial expression, and authoritative tone deeply troubled me. Hence, I reported the incident to the director.

I thought the director would take my complaint seriously because I was uniquely qualified to teach research methodologies, and students could benefit from it. Also, I had picked up the course first, while my senior colleague's request came later. Ironically, to my dismay, the director (also a male professor) supported my colleague by claiming that he was 'senior' and had many other commitments. The director responded, "Don't overthink his unprofessional way of asking. We all know how he is. Let it go." I had to give up, feeling completely helpless and emotionally upset. This experience was one of several I have had over the years in the same department.

Before the incident, a different senior male colleague who had transferred to our department in the middle of the semester asked to take over my half-completed courses because he claimed he had a prior understanding of my course. He did not want to prepare another course to teach. I had to switch to another

new subject during mid-semester and allow the senior male colleague to continue with my course. Both times, I experienced distress and a professional setback and was made to feel ‘Other.’ This informal influence over junior academics (co-workers), pushing them to stop teaching courses they select for themselves and ignoring impolite behaviour from seniors are regular features associated with peripheral academic institutions.

Furthermore, it is well-established that most university seniors are men; they hold the most vital decision-making positions at academic institutions.⁵⁴ In other words, Pakistani universities are, by and large, patriarchal enterprises. In many universities, it is customary for ‘seniors’ to have the first choice in selecting from the approved courses catalogue available in every department. At the same time, ‘juniors’ must choose from the remaining options, regardless of how uninterested they are in teaching them, for various reasons, including unfamiliarity, relevance to their area of specialisation, or other factors. The right to select one’s courses and access higher positions, such as director- or deanships, is still based more on seniority than professional quality, expertise, and up-to-date subject knowledge. Seniors prefer to select the courses they have taught for years and teach them without much preparation, leaving new courses for juniors that require preparation. During the last five years, I have taught seventeen new courses, some related to my expertise, others not. Ironically, these ‘seniors’ are the members of all research boards that regularly discuss cutting-edge teaching and research approaches, but talking the talk and doing nothing has not gotten us anywhere. In addition, being a ‘junior’ in academia disqualifies you from making decisions about academic policy and other crucial matters of teaching and research in peripheral universities in Pakistan. The advantage of having the title ‘professor,’ especially a male professor, is that you will be heard and taken seriously in academic affairs. This hierarchical organisation of universities has adversely affected young faculty and their motivation for innovation in pedagogy and research.

Furthermore, some seniors insist on teaching research methods courses because they are considered light in preparation. This practice has adversely affected the standard of research methods courses taught at Pakistani universities’ graduate and undergraduate levels. Research procedures are the basis of knowledge creation, and methods courses become redundant after no new study materials are added to the already taught syllabuses. Adding new debates and approaches to the research methods keeps the courses up-to-date and relevant. On the contrary, seniors rely on their field experiences to share in the class rather than state of the art in the field. During informal interactions with colleagues in

⁵⁴ Fakhr 2018; Fakhr and Messenger 2020.

the social sciences across Pakistan, it has been revealed that the research methodology courses are considered frivolous. There is no classification of research and teaching universities in Pakistan; thus, all focus on research and teaching simultaneously. Consequently, the knowledge produced in Pakistani universities is flawed, forcing the researchers to keep relying on theories developed in the West.

The colonial practice of bureaucratising academic structures in higher education to uphold ‘seniors’ hegemony is entangled with hegemonic institutional patriarchy, elevating men to positions of power and recognition, whatever their potential, skills, and expertise.⁵⁵ Public universities in Pakistan have been robbed of the potential and energy of young and early-career researchers due to mundane university divisions and hierarchies. ‘Seniors,’ however, who are at the pinnacle of their careers, avoid engaging in intensive teaching; instead, they enjoy sitting in the higher research councils, applying for grants in personal capacities, and enhancing their monetary benefits. As a result, the universities suffer from stagnation. Additionally, in public sector universities, hegemonic and dominant ‘seniors’ prevent younger and early-career scholars from engaging in autonomous research and teaching. It is important to note that most public sector universities do not have teacher evaluations regularly. Hence, there is hardly any talk about the seniors’ contribution to teaching and course updating. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) has also established several criteria for research funding that favour ‘seniors.’ It is almost a dream for an early-career academic to get research funding from the HEC if they do not have a senior as a Principal Investigator (PI). In addition, senior-junior distinctions along gender lines, service duration, or even age amount to retrogressive practices that limit ‘juniors’ and early career academic researchers’ potential, skills, and contribution to knowledge production. In addition, the patriarchal academic environment reifies the colonial legacy of erasure, alienation, and domination at the university. Career women’s struggle with systematic discrimination is a well-researched subject.⁵⁶ Female academics and researchers who challenge such hierarchical structures and domineering practices or speak up for themselves are readily labelled ‘problematic.’

⁵⁵ Dlamini and Adams 2014.

⁵⁶ See Ekine 2018; Maphalala and Mpopu 2017.

No Go Areas and Red Lines: An Unexpected Exposé

While doing my M.Phil. at a public sector institution where I was also teaching, I encountered an utterly disappointing hitch. Having just started teaching in a university department and beginning my first and formal attempt at academic research, I wanted everything to be flawless. As a motivated and enthusiastic graduate student, I was eager to start my research on women's experiences, specifically in the context of seeking redress after sexual assault. I strongly felt that this study would significantly contribute to knowledge about the workings of formal and informal institutions and how women experience them in Pakistan. I did not just want to get a degree. I saw my project as the first step toward a long research career. Later, I realised it was just a dream for a female academic researcher because women's experiences are thought by the masculine academy at once unimportant and forbidden to speak about.

My interest in gender and institutions inspired me to develop a research project examining sexual assaults on women that have occurred or were associated with formal and informal institutions (mainly bureaucracy) in Pakistan. It was a clearly defined puzzle, investigating three well-known sexual assault cases that received much media attention because the attacks were purportedly committed in formal and public social settings. This research was bold, both contextually and topically. I was aware of the cultural sensitivity around discussing such issues in academia. However, I moved forward since it was academic research for completing my M.Phil. Additionally, it would add to the scarce literature on the institutions in Pakistan. It is crucial to highlight that, as a brand-new instructor and researcher, I was unaware of the research's 'no-go areas' where powerful institutions or organisations could be the research subject. The topics that could raise questions about the performance of the mighty bureaucratic institutions and its treatment of women in Pakistan are one example of 'no-go areas.'

After meeting all requirements and performing the necessary edits, I submitted the study proposal to the University Research Board for approval. To my disappointment, the university's research board rejected it. I was shocked and had no idea why this outcome. Completely unaware of what happened, I waited for communication from the research board outlining my proposal's shortcomings. At that time, a student would not present her research proposal to the research board in person; instead, the research supervisor would do so.⁵⁷ According to the unofficial comments made by the board members to my supervisor, "The research

⁵⁷ The practice has changed now, and students present their research proposals to the board in the presence of their research supervisor.

topic does not come under the area of political science, and students of political science should study matters relating to politics and leave the gender issues to the gender studies students.” The research boards comprise ‘senior specialists’ from all faculties; their decisions cannot be challenged. There is no way to disagree with their judgement or appeal their decision. The only way forward was to write another research proposal and present it again.

Consequently, I suspended my research on this topic. However, I thought there should be a way to persuade the research board members about the significance of this research study to change their minds. The isolation of the traditional political science discipline from gender studies and relegating the issues that affect women to a separate discipline is particularly problematic. Additionally, my suggested research would impact several ‘sacrosanct’ organisations (police, military), which still firmly adhere to colonial customs and legacies and are crucial to the country’s establishment. They have inherited bureaucratic authoritarianism from the British Empire and religiously maintain the colonial legacy to date. Talbot notes that India and Pakistan continued the ‘steel frame’ bureaucracy instituted by the colonials to maintain law and order in British India.⁵⁸ Bringing the state’s powerful institutions under scrutiny through research was risky for university boards, which often work in tandem with bureaucracy (national and provincial). Deeply neo-colonial in structure, some institutions are sacred and holy cows, having a royal status in the country; therefore, a slur on their name would not be acceptable otherwise. Moreover, who is a graduate student or an early career researcher to challenge the hegemony of the state’s institutions and the integrity of its members? This is how I try to make sense of the rejection of my proposed research project. Another revelation was the gendered nature of ‘disciplines,’ which in this case was that political science has nothing to do with gender issues. The sequestering of issues that affect women to ‘gender studies’ and keeping them firmly out of the ‘political’ sciences (see below for further discussion).

Also, I heard later that some board members strongly objected to my use of the words ‘sexual assault’ in my description of the topic, which paved the way for complete rejection. Board members stated that using the term ‘sexual assault’ is ‘inappropriate’ and sends the wrong message about our norms and culture. The issue’s sensitivity is unquestionable, but asking difficult questions produces critical knowledge. However, red lines, no-go areas, and institutional hurdles in a research culture promote inauthentic, unreliable research lacking contextual realities and rigour. Moreover, they undermine researchers’ academic freedom to

⁵⁸ Talbot 2013, 29.

explore their areas of interest, deterring them from conducting critical contextual studies to address the problems within the state and social organisations.

Since the British Empire was more interested in maintaining law and order than ensuring democratic representation, it developed bureaucracy and military institutions rather than democratic structures.⁵⁹ As a result, we now have a weakened, imperfect, and ineffective democratic system comprised mainly of (elite) families previously favoured by the British Empire for their excellent job of ‘serving British interests.’ These families were rewarded with lands and wealth, giving them political clout among the populace, which still holds in postcolonial times. Additionally, the state institutions are becoming more potent by the day, restricting academic freedom and reducing public forums for discussion and voicing opposition. In Pakistan, the government’s suppression of dissent has led to the rise of social movements in the peripheries of Pakistan.

In the following vignette, I highlight the risks of multidisciplinary research to early-career researchers and the discrediting attitude of subject experts. This incident happened at a junior scholars’ conference, where I presented a working chapter from the dissertation. One of the subject experts in the audience from the Global North (a member of Pakistan’s diaspora) made very negative comments about my study topic methodology. This exemplary academic interaction illustrates the deep-seated bias of established subject specialists toward interdisciplinary research and area specialisation.

Inter-/Multidisciplinary Approach – A Big No

Interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary are not new concepts anymore.⁶⁰ Transcending discipline boundaries has proved its worth by advancing knowledge and speaking newly to shared problems in the social and behavioural sciences. However, disciplinary boundaries persist, and so does its fierce guarding. Insistent disciplinarity also impedes the vital importance of colonised people and women to every disciplinary field and the potential of their experiences and criticisms under the very foundations of those fields, i.e., Western knowledge.

Some time ago, I received a travel grant to present a chapter from my dissertation at a junior scholars’ conference in the US. The chapter discussed why

⁵⁹ Talbot 2013, 30–31.

⁶⁰ Kessel and Rosenfield 2008; Pratiwi and Supriatna 2020.

Pakhtunwali (a set of informal institutions) remains a durable and ubiquitous code to which Pashtuns still adhere. Anthropologists and sociologists have mainly generated scholarship on the Pashtun ethnic group.⁶¹ I used several studies (anthropology and sociology) as data sources in my chapter. In addition, I addressed the subject by conducting in-depth interviews (IDIs) with local academic experts working on Pashtuns. One of the audience members, an anthropology expert, did not receive my attempt well and came out strongly against my methodological approaches. He explicitly said that interdisciplinary research is less pure and that junior scholars should stick to their respective fields. Also, multi/interdisciplinary work would not establish a scholar's position in the academic community.

Furthermore, he commented on the content that most research on Pashtuns portrays them as victims, harming Pakistan's reputation and humiliating the scholars, originally Pakistanis, who reside and work at the institutions in the global North (i.e., diaspora scholars like himself). It was objectionable that everyone in the room took notice of his comments. I was confused because he made such a long comment without signposting if this was a question or comment. The power dynamics between a well-known and influential figure in the discipline in the West and a novice researcher, a woman who also happened to be of Pashtun ethnicity, were unequal. It severely affected my confidence as a motivated junior scholar. I wondered what had upset them so much. What is it that I cited anthropologists' writings, or did they object to the topic of my study or both? Later in the evening, a global North academic (white) with extensive fieldwork experience in India remarked, "I am sorry about what happened during your presentation today, but interdisciplinary research is not advised if you do not want trouble like this again."

In this event, two factors are worth noting. Firstly, such "disciplinary scolding/disciplining" discourages young scholars from conducting interdisciplinary research within the social sciences. In decolonial terms, this disciplining of the young researchers comes from hegemony in the field. Secondly, the paranoia of diaspora scholars living in the West with the image of their native country and feeling obligated to justify themselves by denouncing area-studies scholarship that they think makes them 'look bad' (probably in response to the challenges of their subject position as global South diaspora scholars working in the West). Interdisciplinarity is a valuable method for studying shared topics among social

61 For instance, Fredrick Barth 1959; James Spain 1965; Akbar Sayed 1985; Benedict Grima 1992; and Charles Lindholm 1980, among others.

scientists, despite its inherent challenges, and has been emphasised as an important moving part of New Area Studies and its decolonial approach.⁶²

Regarding diaspora academics' domination over local researchers, particularly in the realm of public scholarship, it is important to note that academics from Pakistan's diaspora face several challenges in Western academia, such as underrepresentation, peripheral status positions plus concerns with their academic reputation within the broader racialised academic hierarchies and neo-liberal, imperial geopolitics of knowledge production. Being connected to Western knowledge systems gives them an advantage with local academics and researchers while juggling authenticity concerns in the global North academia/diaspora. It seems improbable that the contextual knowledge and research would advance by smearing local researchers. Taking a cue from Foucault, this is one of the causes of the marginalisation, suppression, and obliteration of local knowledge(s).⁶³

In the last vignette, I present an individual in-depth interview with a male researcher who has extensive experience in conducting fieldwork in the conflict zones of the North-western part of Pakistan. This interview illustrates a male researcher's challenges in navigating the conflict-sensitive parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In doing so, I show a male researcher's perspective on the standardised research protocols such as IRBs (developed in the Anglo-Saxon academia) and their inadequacy in fieldwork in the research participant's context. This anecdote contrasts with some of my personal experiences as a researcher in the volatile Pashtun context. My experiences as a female fieldwork researcher highlight concerns like 'how fieldwork is gendered and patriarchal' in Pashtun society, which devalues a female researcher's autonomy and dissuades her from demonstrating 'agency and autonomy.'⁶⁴ Fieldwork is a gendered experience, and

62 It is accurate to say that scientific disciplines are built on specialisation and have their own epistemological and methodological underpinnings that allow them to examine their objects. However, this rigidity should not become a religion because that would prevent knowledge from progressing, which is the case in social and behavioural sciences (Jacobs and Frickel 2009; Lele and Norgaard 2005; Klein 1990). For a discussion of New Area Studies, see: Derichs, Heryanto and Abraham 2020; Fleschenberg and Baumann 2021; Houben, Guillermo and Macamo 2020; Jackson 2020; Rehbein, Kamal and Asif 2020; as well as Knorr, Fleschenberg, Kalia and Derichs, eds. 2022. Special Issue "New Area Studies and Southeast Asia," *IQAS* 51, no. 3–4, as well as the edited volume: Knorr, Lina, Andrea Fleschenberg, Sumrin Kalia, und Claudia Derichs. 2022. *Local Responses to Global Challenges in Southeast Asia: A Transregional Studies Reader*. Both feature also Pakistani / South Asian scholars (in diaspora or not) with comments on this matter.

63 Foucault 2020; Pattaon et al. 1979.

64 Holz and Bano 2022; see also Fleschenberg and Castillo 2022.

opening up discussion on gendered/sexual(ised) treatment is necessary to equip (novice) researchers to deal with situations in which gender comes to the fore.⁶⁵ In addition, it is crucial to pay attention to the experiences of male academics in patriarchal situations.⁶⁶ Patriarchy is a social system of power and hegemony that expects women to act and behave a certain way. Hence, a female researcher's experiences could differ from those of male researchers. It is important to bring a male researcher's perspective to show how conducting research is gendered in traditional social contexts such as Pakistan. Holz and Bano (2022) have also highlighted the women researchers' ordeals in Pakistan.

Research Ethics in Volatile Research Settings: Fixity or Fluidity

Here, I focus on the following question: How do local male researchers educated in Western research institutes like me tackle hegemonic Western research ethics when conducting fieldwork studies in the volatile Pashtun region? To have a male researcher's perspective on the issue, I interviewed SA⁶⁷, a journalist, professor and fellow researcher, about his research practice, ethical dilemmas, and coping mechanisms.

SA's 'research field' in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and former FATA is located at the intersection of a post-conflict scenario and a conflict zone due to a precarious political situation marred by militancy and extremism for the last three decades. It is a particularly active conflict zone due to the ongoing US War on Terror and Pakistan's military operations in the tribal districts. To highlight the disruptions of fieldwork in conflict zones and to provide direction for researchers in similar research environments, it is necessary to extract some insights from the messy experiences of fieldwork. The effects of emotional labour – sharing in the suffering of others, feeling drained by what one witnesses and is powerless to change, and discomfort about one's privileged position – have already been recognised in research dealing with sensitive conflict topics.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ See Clark and Grant 2015; Kloß 2017.

⁶⁶ See Rahat Shah in Batool et al. 2021, 445–51; Khan 2021.

⁶⁷ To maintain the anonymity of the researcher, I shall use these alphabets with his permission to refer to his narrative. SA is a male mid-career academic researcher with good fieldwork experience in the Pashtun region. He is a graduate of Global North academy and was trained in Western research ethics.

⁶⁸ Schulz et al. 2022. See also the diverse (inter-)disciplinary contributions in the special issue

SA noted that, while studying at a US university for a Ph.D., he looked at various research approaches, including ethnography, and discovered that everything was written from a Western researcher's point of view. Western researchers travel to developing nations for intriguing research questions and their potential answers. However, since they come from the outside world, their ethical concerns differ from those of the local researchers in the field. In contrast, local researchers familiar with the cultural nuances of particular social and political contexts face several challenges due to Western research protocols. For local and foreign researchers, it is logical to have a flexible research ethics protocol to cope with difficult situations that may arise during research. He noted, "I work and live in a militarised region where researchers face substantial risks, where Western research ethics do not fully account for those risks. Thus, I must make judgments as I go."⁶⁹

He gave an example to illustrate how he is discouraged by the 'suspicion' and 'distrust' in his social interactions, forcing him to improvise the ethical research code he learned. He visited his daughter's school one day to make a tuition deposit, he saw a warning note posted on the principal's door that said, "منع بے پښتو بولنا" (*Speaking Pashto is prohibited*)." It was a shocking revelation for him. Knowing that children are forbidden to speak their mother tongue (Pashto) at the school premises pained him deeply. Since Pashto plays a vital role in who he is, he wishes to transmit his mother tongue to his children. It wasn't very comforting for him to live in his hometown and have his language taken away from his child. He instantly thought of taking a picture of the notice but considered ethical concerns regarding the lack of formal permission from the school administration. Western research ethics would suggest getting formal consent from the school administration before taking a picture. After thinking and negotiating with himself, he was convinced that taking a photo was not a violation of privacy, as it was a public noticeboard. In this case, the school administration could ask him to leave the premises. The school administration also does not take the visitors' privacy into account. When he arrived on the school grounds, he was immediately under surveillance due to CCTVs in place, without his knowledge or consent.

on "Research Ethics in Volatile Contexts," edited by Bano, Castillo, Holz and Fleschenberg 2022/2023, for a pandemic-related review of global north-centred knowledge productions on research methods and ethics see Fleschenberg and Holz 2021.

⁶⁹ For example, the IRB protocols emphasize the research participant's safety as a priority and would not say much to a researcher about navigating difficult situations. A researcher in the conflict fieldwork is vulnerable and exposed. Thus, a set standard may jeopardize his existence and study.

Although it is fair to be concerned about security in volatile Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it is unethical to videotape someone without their permission. He could not take Western research standards at face value and uphold them when his identity was threatened. Barring his child from speaking his mother tongue attacked his identity. Language relates to identity, nation, region, and religion in Pakistan.⁷⁰ There is a history of systemic marginalisation of local languages at the expense of English (colonial legacy) and Urdu (national language).⁷¹ Thus, this notice was not simple; he interpreted it as a deliberate representation of the state's hegemonic discourses. The research would dictate to make his act of taking photos known to the school administration since it was their premises. Nevertheless, in that case, it was unlikely for him to do so, he shared. Western research ethics are not a monolith, and there are examples of veiled research in unusual circumstances. However, those trained in the US academia know that their commonplace IRBs have little help in the contextualised complexities of research in conflict-sensitive settings.⁷² He said, "It is not about what I like or dislike about the standard research ethics of Western education. It is only that they are less relevant in this context, sometimes not helpful at all." Therefore, despite fighting within, he shot the photo as evidence of how Pashtuns are still subjected to prejudice in practice in their homeland. He was aware of the risk he took, but it was vital for him as a researcher. In conflict zones, life, security, well-being, and identity are at risk and looking the other way is not an option when you are an insider researcher. Additionally, the historical oppression of the Pashtun ethnic group dates to the colonial era.⁷³ This incident and many other interactions demonstrate that working as a researcher in the volatile Pashtun region is "suppressive and depressing," and the emotional cost must be recognised. As Datta⁷⁴ puts it, a researcher must recognise the persistent oppression and domination of colonial research training and incorporate an ethical understanding in his/her research. SA also asserted that the research review boards in the global North institutions emphasise the safety and privacy of research respondents,⁷⁵ which is reasonable, especially when regular people have been brutalised in the name of research.⁷⁶ However, they do not speak to aspects where the local researcher might have to act proactively or improvise, depending on their risk. SA stated:

⁷⁰ Ashraf, Turner and Laar 2021.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Wessells 2015.

⁷³ See Yousaf 2021; Borthakur 2021; Khan et al. 2021.

⁷⁴ Datta 2017.

⁷⁵ See Johansson 2014, Lisiak 2015, Kloß 2017.

⁷⁶ See Smith 1999.

In the field, I question and reason and create a logic of ethics, which is also my contribution to research methods. I have enough books to understand ethical research. Still, for the lack of guidance for a particular context, I could devise my research strategy and write about it for other researchers. When I understand what I am doing is justified, I do not consider myself unethical or ignorant of Western research standards; instead, I contribute to the limited version of research ethics to make it functional beyond the Western hemisphere.

Similarly, SA is intrigued by warning signs near airports and military garrisons in Pakistan. He referred to a particular one that stated. “خبر دار! قریب آتے پر گولی ماردی جائیگی.” (*You will be shot if you approach this area.*)” According to him, these warning signs aid in the subject formation of local people. As a researcher residing in the Pashtun regions, he was inspired to snap images of these examples of the discursive hegemony of the state’s ideological apparatuses and utilise them in his research. SA was particularly concerned about the excessive militarisation of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In response to my inquiry about whether he has any moral hesitations regarding Western-centred research ethics while working in his research settings, he responded:

Established Western research ethics is still determining what I might encounter in the field. However, I need more adequate guidance, so I improvise, rethink, and reformulate research ethics as I collect data in conflict. I tell myself that what I know and experience, the people sitting in the IRBs have no idea about it. Research is a uniform, homogenising experience for them, but that is not the case here.

Why is “research ethics outside the conventional Western research ethics” necessary? (My interjection)

Being an insider, I pick subtle cues, gestures, and symbols and navigate the field accordingly. Research should not be centralised and hegemonised, or we would do more harm than good. In attempting to decolonise research methodologies, I take it upon myself to fight for my place and narrative in the community of scholars from the global North. The research uniform with colonial badges is belittling and undermining and does not help produce my knowledge.

Decolonial research is a way to confront and resist the Western construction of power and supremacy in developing critical knowledge. Therefore, going by his (local) version of research ethics, it is ethical to devise a contextual research strategy to navigate the field. It is crucial to uphold ethics of care, establish limits, and prioritise well-being above continual endurance since our research and personal safety are important.⁷⁷ SA stated:

⁷⁷ Kloß 2017.

I am contributing to this well-founded knowledge out there. Suppose the rest of the world acknowledges when I publish. Why shouldn't they consider the variety of contexts, variety of study settings, and complexity of the research field? I intentionally assert my space and identity and find it ethical to choose what I should study, when, how, and where. That would be my epistemic emancipation, I suppose.

In this vignette, distortions of the researcher's identity (language) and the region's militarisation are moments when he contests Western research ethics' applicability and utility and makes a fair case for acting according to the situation. Also, in the first instance mentioned, he was not in a researcher role formally. Still, he saw an opportunity to collect a vital piece of data for his research and collected it. Using this incident, we can argue that in environments marked with violence and repression, a researcher must opt for a course of action outside the domain of standardised Western research ethics. Researchers have noted various difficulties with upholding ethical conduct standards when conducting research involving conflict settings.⁷⁸

Pakistan is a multi-lingual and multicultural country; its inhabitants speak 77 languages.⁷⁹ As mentioned, the colonial legacy is embedded in Pakistan's social and institutional structures and continues to homogenise diverse communities and ethnicities. Through ideological discursive processes like schooling, the centralising Pakistani state homogenises ethnic populations, including Pashtuns, Sindhis, Balochis, and Saraikis.⁸⁰ A deeper issue highlighted in this vignette is the researcher's responsibility to challenge the ongoing erosion of Pashtun identity by emphasising speaking English or Urdu in educational institutions.

Decolonial research is responsible for justice for marginalised/oppressed/vulnerable people. Unfortunately, standardised Western research ethics do not account for these hegemonic context constraints. Research ethics might suggest that a researcher stays away from risky situations but does not suggest how to navigate them if necessary. Scholars also agree that working with multiple cultures and contexts characterised by violence and instability raises contentious issues, including authority and consent, secrecy, trust and benefit, hazards to researchers, and possible harm to participants.⁸¹ In global North academia, the institutional review boards attempt to uphold institutional interests and the researcher's autonomy through research ethics protocols. However, it may be crucial for researchers working in volatile situations to maintain their adapt-

⁷⁸ See Black 2003.

⁷⁹ Ashraf, Turner and Laar 2021.

⁸⁰ Khan et al. 2020.

⁸¹ See Zwi, Groove, Mackenzie et al. 2006.

ability and capacity to react quickly to ethical or methodological dilemmas in fieldwork.⁸²

SA's personal and collective identity is constantly threatened in the narrative, compelling him to downplay standardised Western research ethics protocols. For many Pashtuns, Pashto is not just a language but a symbol of identity. Tariq Rehman⁸³ observes that as a political strategy, the Pakistani "elite" has seized English as their "cultural capital," representing the "upper" class while disadvantageously affecting the underprivileged to retain their hegemony as a continuation of colonial heritage. As a result, local languages are fading away. Due to the dominance of English among the elite and Urdu's use as the primary language of communication among the educated urban populace, some local languages have already become extinct.

Finally, it is paradoxical that standardised Western research ethics and norms emphasise the security and safety of researchers and study participants in ideal circumstances while neglecting the vulnerabilities, hazards, and difficulties researchers face in unstable and oppressive environments.⁸⁴ It would be too naïve to think that a researcher is a robot, a programmed individual who would navigate, investigate, and explore their field as told. Our personal and professional selves as researchers must resist rather than endure. Those manuals, suggestions, rules, and restrictions make a practical toolbox but are inadequate when the researcher is confronted with contextual politics and hegemonic structures in conflict-sensitive settings. One way to decolonise research and empower marginalised discourses is to empower the local researcher (insider) to devise their own research strategy per their research conditions and complex social environment. In the spirit of epistemic emancipation, leaving the decisions to the researchers themselves is a risk worth taking.⁸⁵

82 For a discussion on research ethics as decolonial praxis and the messy politics thereof, see: Castillo, Rubis and Pattathu 2023; Dilger and Castillo 2022; as well as Sökefeld, Ruby and Gu 2023.

83 Rehman 2010, 239.

84 Chong 2008.

85 See Castillo this volume; Nizaruddin this volume; Castillo, Rubis and Pattathu 2023; Fleischenberg and Kamal 2023; as well as Sökefeld, Ruby and Gu 2022.

Final Thoughts

The incidents and interactions shared in this chapter illustrate the persistent coloniality of knowledge systems, the hegemony of Western epistemologies and research methodologies and colonial frames of domination in universities in the peripheries of Pakistan. Academic research culture often insists on hierarchies and patriarchal norms, rendering younger and female academics/researchers helpless. Additionally, women often have fewer prospects for professional advancement or growth in post-colonial nations, including Pakistan. They are either underrepresented in many organisations or operate on the periphery of organisational life and academic hierarchies. In Pakistan, in all fields of work, whether in private businesses or educational institutions, women's standing has always been inferior to men's.⁸⁶ Although the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) claims in a policy statement to support gender equality in academic institutions,⁸⁷ the reality is quite different. The first two vignettes illustrate the discrepancy between theory and practice.

Pakistani universities implement research norms and practices informed by the colonial past, thus making universities a neo-colonial site of knowledge production. Mignolo,⁸⁸ citing Fanon, addressing the coloniality of knowledge caused by neoliberalism, calls for decolonising knowledge and being. As a key site of knowledge production and consecration, the university is responsible for deciding which histories and topics are 'valuable' to research and disseminate.⁸⁹ Since genuine knowledge is not created in a vacuum but rather by universities via a discursive flux inside a power framework, intellectuals from the global South must focus on contextual realities. To decolonise knowledge production, decolonising the university is a prerequisite. Datta argues that decolonising research methodologies creates empathetic educators and researchers;⁹⁰ hence, it is highly required to decolonise research and researchers, i.e., academia. This is not to say that standardised Western research ethics should be shunned or discarded. Still, there has to be room for appropriation, contextualising, and improvising as per the field realities and power dynamics in place across shifting positionalities.

Decolonisation is a call to stop relying on dominant Western knowledge systems and their products and liberate epistemology and research methodo-

⁸⁶ Shaukat and Pell 2016.

⁸⁷ Fakhr and Messenger 2020.

⁸⁸ Mignolo 2007.

⁸⁹ Gebrial 2018.

⁹⁰ Datta 2017.

logies from deep-seated colonial influence to disrupt the status quo. The commitment and task of decolonisation is a complex route but instead contains a multitude of challenges. Paramount among these is institutional decolonisation. For example, while the university is recognised as a critical site of knowledge production, it is one of the most westernised institutions in Pakistan. Recent student and faculty movements to decolonise higher education and diversify curricula have gained popularity in the global North. Examples include Rhodes Must Fall Oxford's (RMFO), Georgetown University's Plans to Atone for the Slave Past, and campaigns by the UK's National Union of Students called "Why Is My Curriculum White?"⁹¹ and "#LiberateMyDegree."⁹² Similar steps are underway in South African academia, Kenya, North and South Americas and elsewhere.⁹³ However, we do not see such a resistance movement in Pakistani educational academies.

As this chapter shows, Pakistani academic and research institutions are westernised, but what are the repercussions? In Mbembe's words,⁹⁴ the Westernisation of educational institutions means following a Western theoretical model that establishes the epistemic hegemony of the canon of the West by generating discursive scientific practices (research ethics is one) and marginalising other modes of knowledge production. The perpetual inculcation of the 'right' (Western) way of 'research' and how a researcher should carry themselves only reproduces the colonial culture of knowledge production, not original, contextual, and indigenous knowledge. In my experience, the priority and significance of research standards established by Western academic institutions fail to consider local research conditions.⁹⁵ The prevailing research protocols have been established globally under imperialism; thus, they are unlikely to negotiate volatile circumstances in the global South. To perform "cognitive justice,"⁹⁶ it is imperative to decentre research methodologies and research ethics.

Furthermore, another obstructive feature of Pakistani research culture is that dominant and famous researchers, both local and abroad (diaspora), overpower young and early career researchers and discredit their work through domineering, patronising attitudes when engaging with their approaches and research topics. Diaspora academics with expertise in the field and located in the global North have more visibility in the Western academic networks; their word carries

91 Students' Union Bournemouth University "Why Is My Curriculum White?" <https://www.subu.org.uk/mycurriculum/>.

92 Bhabra, Gebrial and Kerem 2020.

93 See Vorster and Quinn 2017; Gordon 2020; Oland, Hart and Frink 2020.

94 Mbembe 2015.

95 See Holz and Bano 2022; see Sökefeld, Ruby and Gu 2023, Batool et al. 2021 and Zuberi 2021.

96 Santos 2008, 1; Castillo, Rubis and Pattathu 202; Thajib 2022 as well as Sakti and Taek 2023.

weight and influence. Due to their association with the Global North's academy, they hurry to judge local researchers on their choice of topics, methodologies and case selection. On the contrary, in the spirit of decolonisation, they should instead encourage local researchers to create contextually relevant scholarship.

Furthermore, a local researcher's sensitivities, vulnerabilities, and strategies for dealing with hegemonic research practices in knowledge creation⁹⁷ are also disregarded by a totalising rhetoric of standardised Western (Anglo-Saxon specifically) research ethics. For example, most students and early career researchers pursue their research in the US, UK, Canada, and Australia, where IRB protocols are a typical requirement to conduct research in one's context. IRBs are helpful but cannot be implemented universally. Being a post-colonial nation (contested term), we as academics and researchers must approach pedagogies and research critically and question the coloniality of knowledge production in Pakistani universities. In addition, combining the epistemic perspectives of regional knowledge partners would successfully challenge the dominant Western canon. The primary responsibility for contesting the Western epistemological coloniality and making connections between academic forums and researchers to respond to epistemic injustices falls on scholars from/in the global South. Hence, to recreate knowledge, a decolonial researcher is not someone for whom research is a mere academic initiative; instead, they must be thoroughly experienced and politically committed. Dismantling basic mechanics of colonial thinking and challenging self-created hegemonic authority are the first steps in overthrowing patronising knowledge experts locally and in the West. Only through epistemic decolonisation can we re-centre knowledge geographically and historically.⁹⁸

To transform the future, it is imperative to undo the legacies of the past. We observe severe flaws in how universities are run and how knowledge is produced in the global South. Decolonial researchers have been trying to respond to and

⁹⁷ See Baykan 2023; Huang 2022; Fleschenberg and Castillo 2022. The social world does not function uniformly. All societies have codes, norms, cultural sensitivities, and sensibilities. Having diverse and pluriverse research ethics protocols for fieldwork in volatile contexts is logical. For instance, Pashtun culture, like other cultures, has its peculiarities that may not be researchable under universalised research protocols developed in the West. One example would be that in rural Pashtun society, accessing women without the permission of their male family members is offensive. When native researchers who understand the nuances of society and culture are not under pressure to adhere to Western research standards, they can more effectively negotiate their study settings.

⁹⁸ Another vital area where colonial frameworks thrive is academic publishing. There is hardly any space for the global South scholars to publish in the well-reputed journals in the global North. For the lack of space, I could not exhaustively discuss this theme.

remedy the situation. However, changing a mutating entity from another age and epoch is challenging. Understanding the nuanced idea of decolonisation is difficult; it calls upon academics and researchers to fundamentally rethink how they should teach and research.⁹⁹ Mbembe,¹⁰⁰ drawing on Ngũgĩ's book *Decolonising the Mind*,¹⁰¹ argues that decolonisation is not about closing the doors on European or other traditions; it means that the centre must be distinctly redefined. Keet suggests, "Only if we view the 'decolonisation of knowledge' as the collective processes by which disciplinary practices are successful in working against the inscribed epistemic injustices of all knowledge formations, can we claim a commitment towards epistemic justice."¹⁰² The transformed future of a decolonised epistemic world would be a decentred one where the West is not the unifocal centre of knowledge, but 'Others' knowledges, knowledge creators/contributors and knowledge-creation practices are given their due place at the very centre(s).

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⁹⁹ Vorster and Quinn 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Mbembe 2015, 17.

¹⁰¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986.

¹⁰² Keet 2014, 35.

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June Rubis

A Political Ecology of Remembering for Dayaks of Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo

Introduction: De-Centring the White Rajah in the Room

I once said to my father, “Tell me something interesting about our family.”¹ Obliging, he told a tale of our great-great-great-great grandfather and uncles, who decided one day that they would stop paying hefty taxes to the Sultan of Brunei. The burden of increasing taxes was taking its toll, and the villagers were left wondering whether the next harvest would be enough to both feed their families and pay off a distant Sultan whom none of them had ever met. And so, they invited the tax collectors to the village on the pretence of making payment. They ushered the tax collectors, all twenty-one of them, into the *baruk* (a wooden circular hut of ceremonies perched on slim logs). Ambushed, the leading tax collector had his head cut off, and his associates were thrown off the cliff. “We’d had enough of the oppression,” my father said.

Unfortunately, the oppression didn’t stop there. Revenge on behalf of the twenty-one dead tax collectors arrived when several women from the village were kidnapped for ransom. The village was furious. They sent some of their best warriors to rescue the women. During their search, the warriors came across a white man. No one from the village had ever seen a white man before. Fascinated with this strange white man, the warriors asked him to help them overthrow this greedy Sultan, and become their King – their White Rajah. The man listened with compassion and regretfully told the warriors that, while he sympathised, he didn’t feel that he was the right person to unite all the warring tribes and usurp the Sultan. But he could return to Singapore, and see if anyone else might be interested in becoming the White Rajah of Sarawak.

And that is how James Brooke ended up here. That geologist went around Singapore asking for help on our behalf, and James Brooke accepted. You know the rest of the story, lah.

¹ This short narrative was initially published as part of the author’s column on September 10th, 2012, in the currently defunct Malaysian online news-site *The Malaysian Insider*, which was blocked by the country’s internet regulatory body on the grounds of national security in early 2016. The website was subsequently shut down by its owners, citing major financial losses.

But what happened to the missing women?

Oh they eventually found them, killed the kidnappers and everyone returned back to the village. Happy ending!

But it's not very empowering that we asked a white man to save us. Why not one of us to become the Rajah instead?

Haiyah, this is the story as told to me by your great-granduncle. How would I know? I wasn't there. You are always asking too many questions.

My article begins with a remembering from my father, who was a co-theorist for this research, along with a teaching on how to better my methods/responsibilities when working with Indigenous communities, including my own.

Remembering can be a powerful political – and decolonial – act. The stories of my Bidayuh ancestors, like those of many other Indigenous peoples, highlight both the complexity of colonial history and the agency of Indigenous communities in navigating those complexities. I therefore begin this article by remembering my father's and my interlocutors' stories, to (re)claim spaces, sovereignty and knowledge.

Remembering can also be strategic, to invoke a past that serves as a reminder that the state could do better in conserving lands, more-than-humans and protecting native customary rights. Through remembering, Indigenous agency and sovereignty are kept alive and continually refreshed in our minds, bodies and landscapes. While these stories can be interpreted in different ways, the act of remembering keeps these stories alive for present and future generations.

This remembering takes place in native customary domains that are also orang utan conservation landscapes in Sarawak, Malaysia Borneo. In examining the different types of remembering, including *contra-remembering*, I reflect on the framing around the current discourse regarding orang utan conservation in Sarawak, how the framing works in the context of relations with native lands and how Indigenous Ibans may resist this framing in *contra-remembering* ways.

This article builds upon the decolonial themes of Indigenous *survivance* and *refusal*,² focusing on the linkages within the conservation and control thesis of political ecology.³ Political ecology has a long history of engagement with conservation, and the governance of conservation is changing through new forms of resource ownership and control, systems, strategies and new actors. Within

² Vizenor 1999; Simpson 2014.

³ Peluso 1992; Agrawal et al. 1997; Dove 1995; Neumann 1997; Sivaramakrisnan 1999; Zimmerer 2000; Jeffrey and Vira 2001; Li 2007; Li 2014; Robbins 2011; Tsing 2005; West 2006.

the conservation and control thesis of political ecology, local producers have lost control of their natural resources and landscapes through the efforts of the state and global interests to preserve sustainability or nature.⁴ In the process, local systems of livelihood, production and sociopolitical organisations are dismantled. Further, “where local production practices have historically been productive and relatively benign, they have been characterized as unsustainable by state authorities or other players in the struggle to control resources.”⁵ For this chapter, I consider the fundamental theoretical propositions of political ecology, including the hegemonic governmentality of conservation,⁶ wilderness as a form of nature that is ostensibly free of human traces or impacts, institutional systems that include traditional resource-management, and current protected areas for conservation which are ecologically and socially problematic and insufficient. I particularly draw on Anishinaabe scholar Vizenor’s work on Indigenous *survivance*,⁷ which refers to the active thriving of Indigenous presence, rather than a mere reaction or a survivable name, over the changing colonial forces. He adds that “native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy.”⁸ Indigenous peoples persist, and sometimes they push back and refuse. I am also inspired by Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson’s deliberation of Indigenous *refusal* as a necessary response towards ongoing colonisation.⁹ Part of the refusal includes moving away from anthropological and ethnological literature on Indigenous communities as no longer a go-to domain of defining the Indigenous political life, and the “construction and definition of Indigeneity itself.”¹⁰ Here in this article, I further explore acts of *refusal* and *survivance* extending from the colonial era towards the present, in response to complex pressures, including conservation interests, onto native customary lands.

This article proceeds in four sections. Firstly, I present collective memories from different Iban and Bidayuh communities (collectively known as Dayak) based on my ethnographic research and my own shared history. I also attend to my positionality as a scholar with Bidayuh heritage, and my own rememberings. Secondly, I explore the broader context of these memories from compiled genealogies or *tusut*, going back twenty-five generations, oral and academic

4 Robbins 2011.

5 *Ibid.*, 178.

6 Foucault 1991.

7 Vizenor 1993.

8 Vizenor 1999, 2.

9 Simpson 2014.

10 *Ibid.*, 33.

literature and empirical data, of which some memories are what I term *contra-remembering*, where remembering is to resist. Thirdly, I demonstrate connections between landscapes and collective memories. Building on political ecology literature, I note how conservation landscapes have never been just sites of doom, but also reflect inspiring periods of resilience and success.¹¹ I argue that our need to remember and rearticulate the past in a way that depicts our agency and resistance is part of our survivance.¹² While I do not fully address the marginalisation of Dayak women’s resistance and organising in this article, I acknowledge their current invisibilities in our political and social histories. In the final section, I suggest a framework for a political ecology of *remembering* that builds on decolonial theory and Indigenous scholarship.

The Dream about the Nabau

Apai told me many stories during the months I stayed with him and his family. Some of the stories were designed to keep me happy.¹³ Similar story telling was also conducted for conservationists, researchers and tourists who sometimes stayed in Apai’s longhouse. These stories are discussed in the co-authored article “Concealing Protocols: conservation, Indigenous survivance, and the dilemmas of visibility.”¹⁴ However, as the months went by, and the tourists and their guides had left, Apai began to recount more personal family narratives of head-hunting by his ancestors, who clashed with other communities over the right to remain on the lands. I was familiar with the themes of these stories, as shared with me by my father, a Bidayuh from Krokong, Bau. In Apai’s stories, the terrifying Ukit lived on tree-tops, and flew like birds to get from tree to tree, instead of climbing up the tree trunks. The best plan of attack was to cut down their home trees, before cutting off their heads. Yet the story that struck to me the most, was the story about the Nabau.

Atok Apai (Apai’s great-grandfather) once had a dream of the Nabau; a giant water serpent that told him that it would help him defeat his enemies, who were sent by Brooke to retaliate against Atok’s community’s refusal to pay taxes and to acknowledge the White Rajah as their ruler. “I would poison the Batang Ai lake,”

¹¹ Osterhoudt 2016.

¹² Vizenor 1999.

¹³ I was initially known to the Batang Ai communities about ten years ago (2006–2007) as a conservationist, conducting orang utan fieldwork in their territories.

¹⁴ Rubis and Theriault 2019.

it had said, in support of Atok's refusal, "and make the surrounding jungles so inhospitable and tiring, that when the enemies finally arrive at the lake, they would be so parched and desperate. After drinking the water, the enemies will vomit and perish." And so, as predicted in the dream, that was what had happened. Atok's people were safe from the poisoned waters, and were able to continue bathing and using the lake without any repercussions.

Reflexivity and Methodology

I build on a remembering that was shared with me by Apai, my closest interlocutor, whose community was also very important to my work. He told me the dream as handed down by his family, during a rainy afternoon when we were sitting around in the longhouse, with work in the rice-fields interrupted. It struck me then how the Nabau was woven rather surreptitiously into the stories shared with me by other interlocutors in different Iban communities. For example, whenever I would ask about stories about the orang utan, or other wildlife, the stories would inevitably lead back in some way to the Nabau.

The Nabau comes to life in the Batang Ai landscapes through these stories and also in the places it still supposedly dwells, perhaps more intimately than the orang utan that is often focussed on in the stories shared with tourists, other researchers, including myself, and forestry officials. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork for my DPhil research in three Iban communities in Batang Ai, Sarawak, Malaysia for about eight months, between the years 2015 and 2016. When my father unexpectedly died, I was very much in great despair for not only had we lost our father, he was also our keeper of our stories, knowledge and traditions. Unlike many of our close relatives still living in our ancestral village, my dad had one foot in the village, and one foot in the 'modern world.' He bore great communal responsibility as well for being the second qualified Bidayuh medical doctor in Sarawak. As a child growing up in the 1980s in Kuching, a small urban centre of mostly Chinese, Malay and Eurasian townsfolk, and with a prominent father, I felt strong pressure from the urban society to prove that I was 'different/more developed' than my rural kin. When I grew older, moved away for further studies and returned home, only then did I begin to gain a better appreciation of my Bidayuh heritage. Raised with an urban mind-set and direct inquisitiveness, I had many questions for my father.

My father was impatient with the ways I had tried to unsuccessfully connect back to my Bidayuh culture. I thought back of the many times I was chastened for asking too many direct questions about our culture and heritage. He had said

bluntly to me once or twice that I was rude for asking direct or too many questions. This scolding made me reflect on the methodology used for ethnographic fieldwork with rural Indigenous communities.

Conventional ethnographic methodology and ethics guidelines dictate that we ought to present interview questions for a departmental ethics review prior to commencing fieldwork. Yet, I found it was less my direct questioning (which provoked unwanted, stilted responses from my interlocutors, including trying to give me answers that they think I would be happy with), and more through my willingness to be absorbed completely and with as little as judgment as possible, into the way of life in the longhouse, that I was able to learn so much more than I had initially imagined through my research framework.

Thus, after my father's death, I was driven to uncover and reflect on my identity as a Bidayuh person with dual heritage, conducting fieldwork with previously rival Iban communities in my home state, and realising how vast and complex the field space is. I stayed in Sarawak, in my hometown of Kuching, to provide company and support to my mother for a year. The Iban family I was closest to during my research sustained our connections through phone messages and occasional visits to Kuching. As such, I consider my own embodied experience as a scholar born and raised in Sarawak, and also as a local conservationist with extended field experience in Batang Ai, as part of my ethnographic research and field space. In total, I conducted twenty months of ethnographic research in Sarawak, working closely on these topics. During this time, I returned to my father's and ancestors' lands in Bau for supplementary interviews, attended Indigenous land-rights and conservation workshops in Kuching, and talked to Indigenous activists. Throughout, I also reflected particularly on my identity as a Bidayuh. In this section, I highlight the methodological tensions and elaborate on my past connections to Batang Ai and the local Iban communities. In doing so, I explore acts of *refusal* and *survivance* extending from the colonial era towards the present, in response to complex pressures, including conservation interests on native customary lands.

The aforementioned story from my father has played in my mind since his death, especially when I read through my field-notes from Batang Ai and recall similar long conversations with my 'adoptive father,' Apai.¹⁵¹⁶ Like my father, Apai told me many stories, and some of these stories take form in dreams. For those born and raised in Sarawak, discussing dreams, including dreams of our

15 Apai means 'father' in Iban, and is a form of respect for Iban male elders. Indai is the female equivalent for Iban female elders, or 'mother.'

16 Cf. 'reflexive approach': Alvesson and Skolberg 2004; Cresswell 2003.

fore parents, is not considered an unusual activity and helps us make sense of our current reality while recounting our past. In remembering these collective memories, I began to make connections between how we, as Dayaks, have always responded with agency towards complex pressures around land rights and sovereignty.

Journeying Back: On Revisiting my Memories

I arrived in Batang Ai with a fresh intent to (re)learn what I knew of the Iban, and of the orang utan landscapes that have captivated the interest of people beyond Sarawak.

Over a decade ago, I was working for an international NGO, and had conducted orang utan nest-count surveys for over two years in the field. My intent then was specific and narrow, that is, to count the nests and observe the habitats. My biological sciences training did not prepare me to try to understand the landscapes from a local person's perspective, or to appreciate their/our knowledge beyond a field assistant's value. I was taught instead to observe 'objectively,' and I therefore missed many opportunities to truly learn and understand the struggles of rural Iban communities and the decisions they have to make.

Of all the people I had talked and interacted with, Apai was the person who took most interest in my research, and he took it upon himself to provide me a thorough education of what it means to be Iban. I became his 'adoptive daughter,' which meant that, whenever I was not working on the farm, I had to take up the gender role of washing his clothes, cleaning up in the kitchen, and serving drinks to male visitors, including tourist guides, despite some of my initial inner resistance. While my father was also Dayak (Bidayuh) and from a village in rural Sarawak, he had never raised his children in fixed gender roles. However, as time passed, I understood that these roles were significant and important to the Iban community, to convey respect and responsibility for being adopted into the community. My adoptive parents would have never asked or assumed the same responsibilities from visiting tourist guides or female guests. I understood that it was also an honour to be truly considered as part of the family by doing daily chores as expected from one of their daughters.

This obligation continued when I returned to Kuching to care for my mother and was expected to keep in touch with my adoptive parents, informing them of my activities. From my adoptive parents' perspective, I had a lot to learn as a daughter, but they had also several times voiced their appreciation that I was not 'snobbish' and that I did everything that they asked of me, willingly. In turn, my

ethnographic responsibility was to make sense of what I saw and was told, and to recount their stories with as much care and respect as possible.¹⁷ Relational accountability that requires reciprocal and respectful relationships within the communities where I am conducting research is an important aspect of ethical Indigenous research.¹⁸

Ethnographic research has been rightfully criticised as a form of knowledge extraction and domination.¹⁹ As a Dayak Bidayuh scholar who was born and raised in an ancestral yet urban environment and with my current connections to a western institution of higher learning, I try to be mindful of how my privilege affects the fieldwork that I do. It is my family connection, as the daughter of a prominent Dayak, that accords me some ease, familiarity and respect with the Iban communities in Sarawak, but also places me in a more considered position. While I aimed to have more counterparts and co-theorists within the communities I had worked with, rather than “othering the subjects,”²⁰ I was still cognisant that I simultaneously hold dual identities with varying privileges as a Bidayuh researcher from a prestigious university. I was ‘one of us,’ but also separate, being identified as an urbanite and being Bidayuh. Smith further describes the complex set of ‘insider’ dynamics that Indigenous researchers have to work through, where assumed advantages also belie hidden challenges, and higher expectations and communal responsibilities.²¹

I could never leave the ‘field,’ for I am as much a part of the field as my interlocutors are. Reflecting on my own identity as a Bidayuh is part of the research. I am reminded of this whenever I am in a western academic setting and am questioned about my views of home, akin to a travelling informant. For the Indigenous scholar, there appears to be no separation between studying Indigenous communities and being studied ourselves. But perhaps by taking the reins and remembering our collective memories, Dayak scholars could begin to re-imagine possible futures beyond what has been documented in literature and taken as truth.

The following section guides and shapes the discussion on *refusal* and *survivance* through remembering. I offer a contextual analysis of the taxation of the Dayak population in Sarawak during the pre-Independence era while highlighting the physical taxation of the population by the Brunei Sultan and Brooke

17 Wolf 1992.

18 Wilson 2008, 40.

19 Said 1978; Wolf 1992; Smith 2013.

20 Lassiter 2005; Marcus 1998.

21 Smith 2013.

dynasty that relate to the previous stories. Many Dayaks had resisted paying taxes to the Sultan of Brunei and also refused to recognise his successor, James Brooke, as legitimate ruler of Sarawak. In doing so, the resisting Dayaks were constantly raided by other Dayaks (the ‘government’ Dayaks) at the orders of James Brooke, with whom they were aligned.

Taxing the Dayaks: Centring Indigenous *Refusal* and *Survivance*

The Bidayus and Ibans had shared similar frictions with the Brunei tax collectors. In Iban oral literature spanning about two to four generations before the arrival of James Brooke in Sarawak, and which continues to the present day, the defiance against the tax collectors of the Sultan of Brunei is well-documented. The complex pattern of involvement between Ibans, local Malays, and the “distant, weak, but still prestigious Sultanate”²² is described by Iban scholar, Benedict Sandin²³ in his book on *The Sea Dayaks of Borneo: Before White Rajah Rule*. Prior to Brooke’s tenure, natural resources in the form of rice harvest, were extracted as pupu tahun (or yearly tax) from the Dayaks and other local communities on the authority of the Sultan of Brunei. The tax collectors were Malay chiefs who were also suspected of collecting for their own wealth. The local communities were taxed annually regardless of the quality of the harvest, and there was growing resentment towards a Sultan who relied on his prestige, and on Malay chiefs to do his bidding. The tax collectors would collect the padi or rice tax, in a special rattan basket called mungut, which in theory would hold one pasu (jar) of padi, the yearly amount required from each Dayak family. However, the construction of the mungut was flexible enough to hold more than the required jar of padi. Angered by this attempt to cheat, the Dayak leaders, notably Luta of Entanak and Ugat of Paku, as described in tusut, frequently slashed the mungut with their parangs.²⁴ The misuse of the mungut carried on into the Brooke era as well. As described in my dad’s story, this anger towards the attempted cheating would sometimes result in the bloody demise of the tax collectors. These rebellious acti-

²² Sandin 1967, 60.

²³ Sandin spoke particularly about Iban works published by “English authors” and it was his desire to present an “Iban side to the story which has not yet been fully told.” Sandin 1967, 60.

²⁴ Sandin 1967.

vities were reported to the Brunei authorities as a form of ‘misconduct,’ and thus there were acts of retaliation against the recalcitrant Dayaks.

My father’s story was not about an impetuous act of rebellion, decided upon a whim. Rather, it spoke of an act of careful consideration at a time of hunger and declining harvest. They could no longer provide enough rice for the hungry Malay tax-collectors and for the Sultan while feeding their own families at the same time. Exposing the cheating tax collectors was a collective act of refusal, and my ancestors felt they also had to put an end to the tax collectors’ cheating. After facing retaliation by forces aligned with the Sultan of Brunei, the next step was to replace him with the Sultan of their choosing.

While the idea of embracing a ‘white saviour’ to displace a distant Sultan did not sit well with me, my father’s story reminded me of the agency and bravery of my ancestors. The Dayaks²⁵ had refused one (self-imposed) ruler for a strange other, and hopefully someone from whom they would get greater political mileage. Vizenor reminds us that Indigenous survivance stories are renunciations of tragedy and victimry, and such narratives are employed as a means of continuation.²⁶

This survivance story contrasts greatly with the mainstream narrative that the Sultan of Brunei had asked James Brooke for help and that Brooke decided to assist him out of pity for the Dayak population.²⁷ That is to say, the mainstream narrative presents the Dayaks as negligible in their effect or importance to the narrative other than asking for help or causing rebellions against the ruling elite. Others have pointed out less altruistic reasons for why James Brooke decided to take over Sarawak, namely, to extend and support British control of trade routes.²⁸ Further accounts also point out that the handover of Sarawak was not as benign as popularly imagined – that James Brooke “wrestled the governorship of the Sarawak River district (‘Sarawak Proper’) from Brunei in 1841.”²⁹ In my father’s story, the identity of the person replacing the Sultan of Brunei didn’t matter as much as the agency and acts of refusal by our ancestors.

Together with Apai’s story, this *remembering* demonstrates that continued, overlapping resistance towards a succession of foreign rulers is an act of *survance* and a way of life that nourishes Indigenous ways of knowing.³⁰ Dayaks

25 Not all Dayaks were welcoming of the White Rajah rule however, as depicted in Apai’s story.

26 Vizenor 1999.

27 I have observed many such re-tellings by tourist guides to European tourists in Batang Ai; presumably to also flatter tourists, as that was the outcome.

28 Tarling 1982; Walker 2002.

29 Cramb 2007, 114.

30 Vizenor 1999.

have not left, but instead have persisted and thrived in Sarawak until the present day, while formerly reigning dynasties have all but lost political influence.

The following section further discusses how dominant *remembering* through anthropological literature disguises the extent of colonial violence towards the Dayaks, particularly through the selective usage of certain terms to describe the so-called ‘plundering.’ As such, the Nabau dream as told by Apai, could be described as part of an Indigenous *refusa*³¹ to contest dominant narratives and to provide an alternate *remembering* that holds true for Ibans.

Raids, Expeditions and the Nabau Dream

Indigenous decolonial scholarship increasingly sheds light on normative attempts to depict a linear and stable account of colonial conquest, settlement and civilisation. Here, I draw upon European accounts, which is another (dominant) form of *remembering* or, in Vizenor’s words, the “literature of dominance, narratives of discoveries, translations, cultural studies, and prescribed names of time, place and person”³² of the expeditions and raids during the Brooke era to provide a cursory overview of bias towards acts of resistance from Ibans. I turn to the refusal of the Ulu Ai’³³ Ibans towards Brooke’s Sarawak to stop “raids”³⁴ and pay door taxes.³⁵ When examined through a decolonial geographical reading, European renderings of expeditions and raids in Sarawak are revealed as tales of romantic conquest by white British colonials.

The terms ‘expedition’ and ‘raid’ are used interchangeably in the anthropological literature about Sarawak; although both described very similar activities, such as plundering and burning down longhouses, slashing rice fields and occasionally taking heads. The former usually refers to raids conducted by the Sarawak government, namely under Brooke dynasty rule. Therefore, expeditions are justified upon moral and ethical grounds of colonial boundary-marking, while ‘raids’ are not. Yet, in 1843, two years after Brooke had occupied the governorship of Sarawak, with the help of British marines, Iban and Malay forces, Brooke attacked and occupied fortified Iban territories, “plundered and burned

31 Simpson 2014.

32 Vizenor 1999, 52.

33 Ulu Ai’ covers a wide landscape in southern-eastern Sarawak, that includes Batang Ai.

34 Quote marks my own and henceforth in rest of article, to depict bias against attacks by the Brooke-ruling forces, vs those who opposed Brooke.

35 See Pringle 1970; Wadley 2004.

surrounding longhouses, and extracted a promise of submission,” driving the Ibans further into the Rejang.³⁶ Brooke’s expeditions were as violent as the raids of which the resisting Ibans were accused.

Since 1868, there were many expeditions against the resisting Ulu Ai’ Ibans who, under Iban leader Ngumbang, refused to pay taxes. Similarly, at the nearby Dutch-controlled border, the Ulu Ai’ Ibans were under siege by the Dutch-aligned forces. These expeditions would claim the lives of 10,000 to 12,000 men taken from purportedly ‘pacified’ areas of Sarawak – the 9 March, 1886 raid against the Ulu Ai’ Ibans is well documented in European literature as the Kedang Expedition.³⁷ Sixteen years later, the Brooke-aligned forces of ‘government’ Ibans, consisting of about 12,000 people assembled in 815 boats, conducted another raid against the Ulu Ai’ Ibans. However, thousands were taken ill due to a cholera outbreak, and as many as a thousand Ibans may have died.³⁸

Rememberings on Native Refusal for Logged Lands

For many, for whom Indigenous resistance towards the White Rajahs has been mostly relegated to the footnotes, if any, of Malaysian national textbooks and tourism texts, and mostly wiped out of public consciousness, the above narrative may seem like impractical remembering. What does it have to do with the current difficult dilemmas over the conservation of native lands and more-than-humans? Yet, if we are to think deeply about place and relations to land and place, we must also think deeply about previous colonisation and land-based power relationships between Indigenous and local populations and the coloniser, and how these are the foundation of the dominant epistemological conservation-thinking that is reproduced in postcolonial times. In other words, we must think about Native *survivance* and other forms of place-based resistance to erasure, including *refusal*, that allow one to survive and maintain presence and relations in places that counter dominant cultural narratives. Here, *survivance* can refer to also remembering other histories of being and knowing.

From these dominant European rememberings/accounts, I now return to Apai’s remembering of the Nabau that had helped his ancestors keep not just their land-based territories, but also their bodies of water. “Jangan ingat sendiri

36 Boyle 1865, 291–313; Pringle 1970, 74–74; Walker 2002, 70–74 in Cramb 2007, 114.

37 Wadley 2004.

38 Baring-Gould and Bampfylde 1989 [1909], 388–9; Pringle 1970, 225–6 in Wadley 2004.

saja,” Apai reminded me after recounting his story, as handed down from his grandfathers. “Don’t just think about yourself. You have to think about the next generation, inheriting the lands.” There are no more places to be buried, except back in your ancestral lands, as I was told. “Where will his grandchildren go? How will they live?” These were the worries that he shared with me. Apai then brought me back to the present day, where I had arrived in a time when the community (consisting mostly of elders) was fighting loggers who had snuck in several times with their logging equipment and were logging what was left of the customary native primary forests: the communities’ pulau galau. This was my first (re)introduction to the landscapes of Batang Ai through Apai’s guidance. En route to their territories, on a speeding longboat from the dam site,³⁹ Apai stopped the engine and pointed to a far distance: a faint jarring brown strip amongst the green hills. “They took our trees,” he said in Iban. Later, he took me to a hill where we could see many kilometres away, logged hill-tops. “We could hear the chainsaws from a far distance,” he added in Iban, “but we were too late to stop them.”



Figure 1: Printed photos from a camera-phone of the elders reclaiming lands from illegal loggers.

About a year before I had arrived, the elders, armed with parangs and old shotguns, went on a half-day hike through the hills, and attempted to confront the loggers, who fled upon first sight. With the help of a younger community member who had a cell phone, they took photos of the felled trees and logging equipment as part of their evidence, and their triumphant (if brief) reclamation of their lands

³⁹ Part of Batang Ai was converted into a concrete-face rock-fill hydroelectric power dam site in 1985, and had displaced about 3000 people from 26 longhouses since.

(see Figure 1). Despite many reports to the local police station and the state forest department, Apai lived in some fear that the loggers would retaliate, and was cautious whenever he had to go to the nearest township to obtain supplies. This act of continued resistance against outsiders attempting to encroach on their territories reflects inspiring strength and local protection of territories, yet these are not the stories that are recounted to tourists, perhaps because stories of rebellion against the White Rajah do not fit into the perceived tropical romance created for tourists. These poses of silence are never natural. A local reporter had taken interest in the resistance, and it was written up in the local media. Apai showed me the carefully clipped, laminated pieces with pride (see Figure 2). However, despite the vast remote distance and access-difficulty, these forests remain vulnerable for exploitation by the most determined loggers.

Apai explained why he fights hard to secure his community's territories, for about eight generations at least have lived on these very lands that I am visiting. The hope was that his grandchildren would inherit and continue to connect with the lands, just as he and his forefathers did, with grace from the Nabau – lands that are cultivated with rice, and other smallholder farms, lands that remain wild, and lands that were laid to waste by loggers.



Figure 2: Apai's laminated press article, highlighting the illegal logging on their native customary lands.

It had struck me that, in Apai's remembering of the Nabau story, there was no sense of shame or regret associated with fighting against the Brooke army. If the Brookes were 'well-loved' by the local population in Sarawak, as many Brooke supporters would claim, they were just as much resisted, and their claims to rule Iban and other territories were refused legitimacy.⁴⁰ The wider spiritual and polit-

⁴⁰ There were three well-known major rebellions (Rentap in 1853; Liu Shan Bang in 1857; Syarif Masahor in 1860) against the Brooke administration.

ical conjunctures of the Nabau assisting the Ibans were part of the refusal's symbolic significance.

Survivance through acts of remembering continues until present day. Today, in all three Batang Ai communities I visited, the Nabau still exists in various ways in the stories told, and also in rocky outcrops of particular sections of the river. During my days as a conservation field-worker, I was singularly obsessed with orang utans, forever scanning the treetops for their nests, even when I was no longer doing nest count surveys. I would scan for nests as we drifted down the river in a longboat, heading back to camp. This time around, I allowed myself to be open to all senses, and to be guided by the conversations. In the silence of drifting down the river, my interlocutors proffered in an almost reverent tone: "This is where the Nabau lives, this is where the Nabau fishes, this is where our ancestors first saw the Nabau." It is my feeling that the Nabau is often mentioned more respectfully by my Iban interlocutors than, say, the orang utan. These rememberings also demonstrate how place and space are intimately connected to history and ideas of identity.⁴¹ But also, places, according to Indigenous worldviews, have agency and are relational.⁴²

These landscapes are rich with stories of resistance, persistence and triumph. Seeing the land through the eyes of a former conservationist, and of someone beginning to unravel the complexities of what it means to be Bidayuh in a contemporary era, I began to remember Batang Ai as more than just a conservation landscape created for orang utans that we had to save from the people living on the lands. Place is not meant to be an object of study⁴³ or to be acted upon. I had to relearn place's responsibilities and obligations, and stay connected with place while acknowledging the differential relations and duties this entails.⁴⁴ Previously rigid concepts and narratives about landscapes and biodiversity were being pushed out, not unlike how my ancestors pushed off cheating tax-collectors of the baruk. I could hear and see place. These stories of rebellion, in turn, are heard and seen by the communities and place to which these stories co-exist with.

In the next section, I tend to the different dynamics of remembering, which sometimes lead to *contra-remembering*, particularly in normative narratives. I also point to the strategic and selective use of remembering the Brooke legacy by Indigenous land-rights activists. The following section therefore discusses the

⁴¹ Basso 1996; Nazarea 2006.

⁴² Larsen and Johnson 2017.

⁴³ Daigle 2016.

⁴⁴ Bawaka Country 2018.

political impact of the different types of remembering in relation to land – not just decolonial remembering but the different rememberings by different people.

***Contra-remembering* the Brookes: Landscape, Resilience, and Memory**

Within the conservation and control thesis of political ecology, local and Indigenous peoples have been deprived of access to lands and other natural resources, and have lost the ability to conserve species and areas through their customary laws and ways. Further, where local practices have historically been productive and relatively benign, such practices have been characterised as unsustainable by the state and other parties in conflicts over the control of resources.⁴⁵ In contrast, colonial-era land management practices are often remembered as positive interventions. Here, I tend to the political ecology strands of such *contra-remembering*. Tuck and Yang remind us that colonisation has been reinforced by the theft of land and place, and with it, the underpinning idea that colonials were better land managers.⁴⁶ In Sarawak, there appears to be a historical nostalgia for the Brooke era, where it is perceived that the Brookes were better caretakers of native customary rights compared to the current state government. Part of this nostalgic revival includes a Hollywood movie production about James Brooke, with the help of a descendant and current heir of the Brooke family.⁴⁷ A *Guardian* article highlights a quote from an Iban land-rights activist:

Many people in the longhouses say they yearn for the days of the white rajahs, who established village boundaries that included most of the areas that communities claim today as their traditional land. Many have ancient pictures of the Brookes on their walls. “The British colonial authorities recognised the Dayak land rights,” said Nicholas Mujah, a former senior civil servant who now gives evidence in court for communities making land claims, emphasising the long-standing nature of their customary land rights. But after independence, the new government began to claim that all forestland belonged to the state.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Biersack 2006; Robbins 2011; Wolf 1972.

⁴⁶ Tuck and Yang 2012.

⁴⁷ See <https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/entertainment/2017/07/06/white-rajah-malaysias-first-hollywood-epic-film/>, accessed July 27, 2022.

⁴⁸ See <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/mar/24/in-malaysia-how-protecting-native-forests-cost-an-activist-his-life>, accessed July 27, 2022.

This idea that the British colonial authorities through the Brookes had cared more for customary land rights and for forests, compared to post-colonial rule, clashes with the historical fact that European-inherited land legislations such as assumption of state proprietorship in land, the requirement to utilise land to justify continuing tenure, and the misinterpretation of unoccupied or unutilised land as 'idle' or 'waste' land, was introduced in Sarawak in the beginning of the Brooke period and continued into British colonial times between 1945 and 1963. Throughout the Brooke period, misunderstandings of and prejudice against shifting cultivation and communal longhouse tenure, influenced confusing and contradictory approaches to land law and administration in Sarawak.⁴⁹ Similarly, following British colonial examples in Malaya, land development by migrants was encouraged through an 1876 proclamation for grants of land for 99 years at a "nominal rent" to Chinese pepper and gambier planters.⁵⁰ These and other land legislations slowly eroded native customary rights, whereupon, based on the assumption of state proprietorship of all land, natives themselves were considered to be squatters on their own lands. This perception that the British were somehow respectful of holders of native customary rights has carried into present day. After independence, recognition of customary access has been increasingly restricted, with rights and entitlements being decided upon by the state.

While there is much well-deserved critique of postcolonial state development in Sarawak, as pointed out by Malaysian academic Fadzilah Majid Cooke, the Brooke land legislation and law legacy resulted in "serious repercussions in local access and native customary management regimes, and this still has not been questioned today."⁵¹ It is important to note that colonisation is also understood as an ongoing structure.⁵² One might ask, why is it easier to criticise postcolonial development than to question the roots of the slow erosion of native customary rights in Sarawak? Why do some Dayaks look upon colonial rulers with an apparent rosy tinge of nostalgia? While understanding that colonisation continues in present day, it is also vital to acknowledge Indigenous ways of *survivance*.⁵³ This added layer of complexity suggests subtle Indigenous refusal of what it means to live in this contemporary era.

49 Cramb 2007.

50 Porter 1967, 38–39 in Cramb 2007, 128.

51 Cooke 2006, 27.

52 Wolfe 2006.

53 Vizenor 1994.

***Contra-remembering* the Brooke Legacy**

Contra-remembering is a decolonial political act that suggests distinct, non-confrontational modes of agency. Post-independence, some Indigenous activists may bring up the Brooke era more favourably than is justified. However, understanding the way some Dayaks collectively remember the past requires looking beyond the stereotype of poor oppressed Dayaks needing an outside saviour, and reading ambiguity and complexity in different strategies and motivations.

Indigenous activists may perhaps invoke Brooke in a positive light, but only to counteract the state's development plans on native customary lands. This *contra-remembering* is not to ask for a Brooke descendant to return and rule over Sarawak once more, but rather a call to remind Dayak politicians and elite of their failed collective responsibility to look after their less-advantaged kindred and native customary lands.⁵⁴

Contra-remembering the Brooke legacy could therefore be seen as a strategy to shame local Dayak/Malaysian politicians for neglecting native customary rights. This tactic may resemble a subtler strategy of *refusal*.⁵⁵ In particular, Simpson's work on Kahnawà:ke Mohawk refusals as both stance and theory of the political, reveals acts of concealment and refusal as legitimate decolonial responses to colonial processes.⁵⁶ In other words, *refusal* is the revenge of the consent.⁵⁷ Similarly, Cepek's work on outward acts of consensus and cooperation concealing the persistence of critical consciousness and internal debate is useful to this work.⁵⁸ Where Brooke nostalgia has been useful to tourism and as a state political countermeasure to remind the federal government of our unique and separate history, *contra-remembering* the Brooke legacy could be seen as part of a complex strategy to keep the native customary rights debate wrenched open.

There is a danger of non-Indigenous Asians and/or Westerners (mis)reading the *contra-remembering* of the Brooke legacy as an invitation to step in, and become self-appointed leaders in native customary rights campaigns or to speak for Sarawak natives on international platforms, thus further endangering the land-rights debate, and the Dayak identity to remain simplistic and reductive. The idea of Indigenous identity that is fixed in imaginaries of savourism must be

⁵⁴ Mujah, pers. comms., 2016. Nicholas Mujah who was quoted by the *Guardian*, later clarified his remarks to me.

⁵⁵ As articulated in different formations by Li 1999; Scott 2008; Simpson 2014.

⁵⁶ Simpson 2014.

⁵⁷ McGranahan 2016.

⁵⁸ Cepek 2011; Cepek 2016.

disrupted. Is it possible to hold to this *contra-remembering* while also remembering the efforts and victories of resisting Dayaks? The remembering of my father's and Apai's stories is hence an attempt to remind ourselves of resistance and the current survivance of Dayaks today.

Towards a Framework of *Political Ecology of Remembering*

As a way of attending to the specificities of Indigenous approaches to conservation practices, I turn to decolonising methods. More specifically, analysing how Indigenous stories of survivance and refusal connect back or relate to conservation landscapes or places constitutes a *political ecology of remembering* approach. Place, as an analytical and methodological location, challenges coloniality and its present-day manifestations. *Contra-remembering* as method and practice presents a particular frame for attending to Indigenous peoples' engagement with conservation practices. For instance, in the context of Borneo (and therefore, Sarawak), customary rights are contested and rural communities are depicted as threats to biodiversity.⁵⁹ Further, Scott's work on resistance⁶⁰ has influenced the extent to which local people, despite marginalisation, are recognised as playing an important role in the success of conservation policies.⁶¹ I build on this work by considering a decolonial remembering approach. Within this decolonial framing, I consider Osterhould's political ecology of memory framework.⁶² The theoretical intervention that I offer is a re-imagination of *remembering*, or *contra-remembering*, as opposed to the general idea of memory.

Indigenous pain, and the failure to uphold static romantic identities of the Indigenous past are often noted in the conservation discourse.⁶³ While many of these narratives are rooted in reality, and contribute to the political ecology framework, these painful histories do not fully constitute what it means to be Indigenous in the contemporary era. Indigenous peoples are vulnerable to not

⁵⁹ Clearly 2008; Colchester 1993; Eghenter et al. 2003a; Eghenter et al. 2003b; Eghenter and Labo 2003; Eghenter 2006; Peluso 1992.

⁶⁰ Scott 1990; Scott 2008.

⁶¹ Agrawal and Ostrom 2006.

⁶² Osterhould 2016.

⁶³ Berkes 2012; Brantlinger 2003; Brockington et al. 2012.

just the dispossession of lands, but also of dispossession of narratives/stories, particularly the remembering of survivance and political consciousness.

What does this mean in terms of conservation practices? When Indigenous peoples are dispossessed of their stories of agency, colonial refusal, and political strategies, they are locked into narratives of victimry, which further denies them access to the conservation of lands and biodiversity. My working understanding of *remembering* emerges primarily from Indigenous scholars' notion of storytelling. Stories are how Indigenous peoples define and redefine their/our sovereignty, spaces, cultures and knowledge. Storytelling (through collective memories) reclaims "epistemic ground that was erased by colonialism" and also "lays a framework and foundation for the resurgence of Indigenous sovereignty and the reclamation of material ground."⁶⁴ Remembering stories of *survivance* and colonial *refusal* brings the history of colonialism and its present-day consequences back into the discourse of Indigenous customary rights and conservation, as well as disrupting how we structure the present.

What further imaginative possibilities are there for a future that goes beyond occupying a framework that continues to patronise rural Dayak communities, whether to "save conservation landscapes" or to develop rural landscapes? How do we recognise and respect that Dayaks ourselves change, adapt, acquire new skills and desires, and yearn to return home to the land? In examining Indigenous oral narratives as methodologies for decolonisation, Baldy suggests that "Indigenous oral narratives were developed as living histories and were understood not only as documents of the past, but also living philosophies of the present and future."⁶⁵ Million further argues that orally based communal "[knowledge] systems are theory, since they posit a proposition and a paradigm on how the world works... Story is Indigenous theory."⁶⁶

Similarly, I suggest that including the remembering of stories of *survivance* and *refusal* in ethnographic methodology would uncover further hidden power relations and the multiple strategies that Indigenous peoples undertake, as well as their aspirations. Yet this attending to *remembering* is not meant to be a "discovery narrative."⁶⁷ This methodological approach is a practice in listening and feeling for lesser heard, at-times misunderstood stories. Rearticulating these stories speaks back to the politics around land development and conservation today. The Iban farmers in Batang Ai continually battle with competing interests

⁶⁴ Sium and Ritkes 2013, III.

⁶⁵ Baldy 2015, 18.

⁶⁶ Million 2014, 35.

⁶⁷ See Rubis and Theriault 2020; Todd 2019.

on their lands, including those of conservation, ecotourism and logging. They have to constantly negotiate with, cope with and welcome, with seemingly open arms, more powerful players, such as forestry personnel, ecotourism guides, tourists, conservationists and researchers who often drop by. Li (2014), Nadasdy (2003; 2007), Ribot & Peluso (2003), West (2006) and many others note the many inequalities embedded in power relations and cultural differences that impede effective co-management in conservation landscapes in Borneo and elsewhere. I build on this work by rethinking *remembering*, or *contra-remembering*, as part of a decolonial political ecology approach. As such, Apai and other community members, and Indigenous activists either hide their protocols,⁶⁸ tend to narratives of *contra-remembering*, or at times, refuse, either in outright defiance or through other subtle strategies.⁶⁹

I offer the following questions for consideration when designing conservation or sustainable development frameworks: how may *remembering* Indigenous stories of survivance and refusal offer alternative approaches to the study of conservation landscapes? How might *remembering* impact the ability of local policy-makers to craft more effective and people-friendly conservation governance policies? How do we begin to understand and respect the different approaches and strategies of Indigenous communities and individuals/activists, while insisting that they cannot be perfect representations of Indigenous identity, and that their ‘imperfection’ should not be used to justify the imposition of policies or programmes designed without their consent or input? In attending to place, we need to stay within the perplexity of coexistence and take up such challenges in place-based, ethical ways.⁷⁰

Therefore, when thinking about decolonisation that is processual and relational, and a *political ecology of remembering*, where Indigenous peoples’ *survivance* and agency is centred, we can begin to re-imagine more collaborative forms of conservation that meaningfully account for local Indigenous knowledge and ways of nurturing land and relationships.

⁶⁸ Rubis and Theriault 2018.

⁶⁹ Li 1999; Scott 1990; Simpson 2014.

⁷⁰ TallBear 2014.

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Muhammad Salman Khan, Sarah Holz and Andrea Fleschenberg

Visualising Research in South Asia Beyond Pandemic Times

Reflections and Future Directions*

Researching in Pandemic Times – Mapping Initial Thoughts and Concerns

“Seeing, or the inability to see something, is political. In a world which has tried to make all things visible, the natural history of viruses has been a history of visualisation fuelled primarily by fear,”¹ writes Sria Chatterjee, zooming into pandemic times where the coronavirus’ visibility “has been both panacea and political tool – depending on who does it – and processes of visualisation are implicated in forms of care as much as they are in political violence, surveillance, xenophobia and institutional racism.”² One key aim of research is to produce knowledge and claims about what is unknown, unheard, invisible, about what needs (re)consideration or a particular kind of understanding. It is about problematising, modelling and presenting some kind of temporal certainty of insight (or “expertise”). Research knowledge is not only about “seeing,” but also about scale and cognitive radars or compasses. So, what do you see, or think you see when producing knowledge, when engaging in research in pandemic times? Where do you look, how, why, with whom, or shall we say for whom? What does it mean for future scholarly quests in terms of epistemic, methodological and ethical practices? When is the pandemic over, and is there such a thing as a post-pandemic era? What are the snapshots of these pandemic times? How do they inform

* Parts of this chapter (namely Researching in Pandemic Times and Spotlight 1 are based on or taken from sections written by the three authors in the following co-authored article Batool, Fleschenberg, Glattli et al. 2021. Other sections (namely Spotlight 2) are based on or taken from Fleschenberg and Holz 2021. Both articles are part of a special section in the journal *South Asia Chronicle*. The special section is entitled “Researching in Times of a Pandemic,” co-edited by Andrea Fleschenberg, Sarah Holz and Salman Khan. Permission to use either verbatim or paraphrased segments of the articles has been granted by the editorial team of the *South Asia Chronicle*.

1 Chatterjee 2020.

2 Ibid.

where you are heading next as a scholar? Where do you not dare to look, and why? What have you stepped away from? What have you stepped into without hesitating for the blink of an eye? These are some of the questions that have been on our minds since March 2020 when the World Health Organisation declared the rapid spread of infections caused by the Covid-19 virus a pandemic. In this article, we discuss three issues that we consider critical for future knowledge-production endeavours that deploy a decentred, decolonial approach to research praxis. In connecting these points to the pandemic, we also partake in telling the story of the pandemic. The first issue relates to establishing protected workspaces for scholars. We then ask how to re-think the aims and objectives of knowledge production and research practices in the context of slow science and the ethics of care. The third issue we flag pertains to the ethics and modalities of research collaborations, particularly between global north and global south contexts. Neither issue is new or exclusively connected to the pandemic, but the pandemic has highlighted the necessity and urgency of re-considering and engaging with them.

We base our mapping on our own research experiences, participation in a number of conferences, events and research projects related to decolonial practice, and research during the pandemic as well as an extensive literature review, and conversations among the working group *Researching in Times of a Pandemic*, with a focus on South Asia. In the following section, we elaborate on our own journeys, the working group and then end the first section with further elaborations on research during and beyond the pandemic. We then discuss three spotlights: the creation of a protected workspace, practicing the ethics of care, and implementing research collaborations. In the last section, we contextualise the spotlights in the existing literature.

We, the co-authors of this article, have witnessed critical geopolitical events from sometimes different, sometimes joint, vantage points, given our own socio-spatial positioning.³ Between 2020 and mid-2022, we watched numerous regional and global ramifications of the pandemic unfold, knowing that they affected our identities, academic biographies and everyday realities. We had few, or only distant reference points to fathom how this pandemic would affect our professional and private lives because, like everyone else, we had simply never been in such a situation before. While it was clear early on that some people would be more affected than others, how these effects would play out was difficult to predict. In universities and research institutions, there was a rush to take

³ At the point of writing, Salman Khan is affiliated with King's College London, UK. Andrea Fleschenberg and Sarah Holz are affiliated with Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany (Humboldt-Universität is a copyrighted title and for this reason cannot be translated into English).

teaching, events and research online. No longer able to meet in person, there was little space or time to discuss the smaller and larger issues that the pandemic was generating in our social and professional lives. A few months into the lockdowns, Andrea Fleschenberg and Sarah Holz noticed that the limited conversations we did have with colleagues and early career researchers converged on similar themes.⁴ We thus decided to form an informal working group focused on South Asia, primarily India and Pakistan, for those in our immediate circle whose work has been and continues to be affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and its manyfold (in-)direct mid- to long-term implications.

We set three overarching aims for the working group: (1) to create a space to explore and discuss the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on research and communities in South Asia; (2) to exchange and collect experiences as well as useful resources to support planning and conducting critical research in pandemic times and beyond; and (3) to establish a co-learning platform for critical knowledge production. Especially knowledge production with regard to research design and methods, sampling and ethical challenges attendant to engaging in research in pandemic times. Through exchange and dialogue, we hoped to create a sense of community that would leave us feeling less alone; a space for sharing and thinking together about contingency plans, alternative research approaches in epistemological, methodological and ethical terms and for providing care in these challenging times. The open-ended discussions helped us gain knowledge about members' everyday experiences of doing research in global south and global north contexts. These multi-centric experiences help us build shared frames of reference that allow each member of the working group to better grasp our colleagues' struggles, which can help to build more context-sensitive collaborations. With this approach, we speak to the overarching aims of the co²libri project.⁵

With these objectives in mind, we emailed early career researchers in our network to set up the first meeting of the working group in the summer of 2020. At this time, Salman Khan joined our faculty team to coordinate and mentor the working group. Before our first meeting, to help kick-start the discussion, we circulated a number of readings by authors who reflected critically on the pandemic.^{6 7} During the first meeting in autumn 2020, each participant briefly pre-

⁴ Fleschenberg and Holz 2021.

⁵ Batool et al. 2021.

⁶ Bisoka 2020; Das 2020; Hussain 2020.

⁷ We understand this article primarily as a contribution to experience-sharing, documenting research work in progress and providing a space for a much-needed reflexive process. We do not

sented the issues and questions they were currently grappling with. Based on these elaborations, we mapped salient issues and aspects that required further consideration, and compiled a collection of e-resources and open access material. Subsequently, we encouraged members of the working group to develop vignettes to document and illustrate their struggles. These were used to initiate and further our discussions, and to elicit feedback and peer support. Most working group members were at different stages of their PhD journeys and their respective contributions were like pieces in a puzzle that helped us to map (missed) opportunities, coping strategies, emotional challenges in terms of researcher's feelings and resilience against fast-approaching deadlines, limited and dried-up funding, as well as performance indicators and academic career trajectories that were unlikely to change.⁸

In the first phase of the working group meetings, between September 2020 and December 2021, the working group consisted of nine permanent members and a few others who joined occasionally. Six working group members have grown up in either India or Pakistan, moving to Germany or the UK for their studies. Three working group members were from either France or Germany and have lived in India or Pakistan for extended periods. With the exception of one person who is an independent researcher based in Pakistan, all working group members were affiliated with universities in Germany or the UK. One working group member was initially affiliated with a university in Pakistan and then moved to a German university in June 2021. All members work on social science topics related to India or Pakistan. Hence, most of us move between different settings. With the exception of the three co-authors of this chapter, the other working group members were early career scholars at various stages of acquiring a PhD or a MA degree. Beyond this, the gender, age, skin colour, ethnicity and level of education of working group members are diverse, as are the areas of interest, the people and communities we work with, as well as the effects of the pandemic on our communities and research.⁹

engage extensively with the existing and emerging broader state of the art related to the topics presented here. This is the subject of a separate contribution of two of the co-authors. See Fleschenberg and Holz 2021.

8 Batool et al. 2021.

9 In the first half of 2022, the second and final phase of the working group, we enlarged our geographic scope to South East Asia, with a particular concern for transregional questions. This phase is not included here because the description of the specificities of each locale/community is beyond the scope of this article. For more detailed discussions and experience-sharing, see the various contributions to the special section co-edited in *South Asia Chronicle* (2021) as well as Fleschenberg and Castillo 2022.

The convergence of variegated identity- and context-based factors creates opportunities and challenges that are specific to each person seeking to produce knowledge. A large corpus of literature explores and examines how the positionality of the researcher and the context and location of the study shape research practices.¹⁰ While our worries were diverse due to our unique positionalities, a number of concerns were quite similar. Disruptions ranged from travel restrictions to technological disconnects, delays in research activities, and questions of health and risk. These challenges could not be addressed by applying standard research ethics protocols. For many years, scholars have highlighted that those who work in countries of the global south and global south scholars who work in the global north often face challenges that diverge from ‘standard’ ethics and research practice protocols. The pandemic has once again highlighted that established protocols are no longer adequate in either the global south and the global north. Apart from re-thinking them in general, a differentiated approach is necessary.

Having said that, all three co-authors have mentored early career researchers working in and on the global south, and we were already used to adapting research designs, research tools and sampling strategies and field sites to fit volatile contexts. This also involved developing multiple, flexible, context-sensitive and care-oriented contingency plans. For instance, when planning research projects and mentoring we took the following factors into account: frequent electricity or internet cuts, protests, attacks or socio-political violence putting those involved at risk or placing a too strenuous burden on research participants and team members. However, mentoring and planning research projects during a pandemic raised additional questions about long-term implications of any changes that were made during the pandemic for research projects. It required different considerations for planning, access, rapport-building and ethical implications in a rapidly evolving context marked by uncertainty and widespread anxieties and newly emerging and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and inequalities. When we are not sure what is happening, how can we judge the scope and ramifications of the unfolding phenomenon? How is it possible to plan for the future? Even the most reflexive, context-sensitive and flexible planning requires us to build upon certain parameters that we can take as ‘given,’ ‘stable,’ ‘known,’ or ‘mapped out.’ We need a radar of sorts, even if taken with a critical pinch of salt, that provides certain ‘visibilities,’ or rather ‘cues.’¹¹

¹⁰ See England 1994; Rose 1997; Moser 2008.

¹¹ Batool et al. 2021.

Initially, we were primarily interested in practical aspects of planning and conducting research during a pandemic. However, the situation changed from September 2020 to 2022. By mid-2022, it almost seemed like the pandemic – as a public health emergency – had become an afterthought for many, especially when planning a research project (which changed again towards the end of 2022 with concerns over a new “wave” from / in East Asia). Nevertheless, we recognise that the pandemic has impacted our lives significantly in myriad, direct and indirect ways, and that we continue to discover and come to terms with its various ramifications. This is why it is imperative to consider how to account for the pandemic as we analyse data and write up our findings, a question that does not seem to receive sufficient attention. Furthermore, we need to explore how the pandemic affects knowledge production and academic practices more generally. Another necessity is to document how far the phenomena we study changed due to the pandemic, and to flag the new questions and issues that emerged. At the same time, we should not lose sight of other pressing issues. This begs the question: Does the pandemic constitute a radical turning point for research praxis which has been critiqued for a long time by decolonial, feminist scholars in particular (but not only)? As many have noted over the past two years, we should use this experience as a critical juncture to further decolonial and feminist debates, posing hard and uncomfortable questions about institutional structures and the politics of knowledge production which often fall through the cracks in our busy schedules or are side-lined by mainstream institutional practices and in our respective academic fields. Looking at these issues in late 2022, it seems that many of these urgent questions are no longer at the centre of discussion. With this contribution, we seek to keep them alive. So, what is at stake when calling for using this critical juncture to push for an alternative research praxis – or, in other words, a decentred, decolonial and feminist academic praxis?

Mapping the Terrain of Decolonial Academic Praxis – Insights and Guiding Lenses

Debates on a decolonial turn and subsequent demands for a concrete, alternative decolonial praxis and the critical scrutiny of universities as institutions with colonial legacies and continued coloniality in teaching, research, publishing and

hiring have become more pronounced in the past decade, but are far from new.¹² The emergence of these demands also led to a series of critiques that the ‘decolonial’ has become a buzzword or hype,¹³ in the words of Laclau, an ‘empty signifier, or, to borrow from Tuck and Yang, a ‘metaphor.’¹⁴ Others discuss whether decolonising can take place within universities’ existing institutional frameworks – a reform or transformation from within – or whether it requires a more radical response.¹⁵

The parameters required for a concrete decolonial research practice that decentres established ways of learning, sharing and producing knowledge are: (1) reflexivity, (2) critical awareness of positionality/-ies, (3) gaze, (4) inclusive, accountable and equity-oriented co-production/cooperation, and thus (5) relationality, along with (6) intersectional-conscious multiplicity plus diversity in terms of epistemological, methodological and research ethical practices.¹⁶

Raewyn Connell emphasises that any “decolonial or anti-colonial method is a practical activity” of knowledge production. Thus, it consists of the concrete acts “of the lives and situations of the people who do that work”¹⁷ – acts that are inherently relational and collective, done with and in the presence of many others, and contributing to various communities and lives across a number of fields and arenas, beyond the myopic concerns of academia.

In their radical critique, Tuck and Yang emphasise the notion of ‘unsettling’ as key to the decolonial endeavour. ‘Unsettling’ means working against imperial/settler-centred reconciliation, against erasure and the absorption of decoloniality to counter settler-colonial anxieties of guilt and haunting along with “moves to innocence.”¹⁸ They tell us that

[d]ecolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation. When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression.

12 Iroulo and Ortiz 2022; Connell 2021 and 2017; Bhambra et al. 2020; Mbembe 2016.

13 Moghli and Kadiwal 2021.

14 Tuck and Yang 2012.

15 See for instance Iroulo and Ortiz 2022; Moosavi 2022; Connell 2021; Bhambra et al. 2020; Mbembe 2016; Tuck and Yang 2014 and 2012.

16 See Iroulo and Ortiz 2022; Moosavi 2022; Barnett-Nagshineh and Pattathu 2021; Moghli and Kadiwal 2021; Abimbola 2019; Connell 2017; Mbembe 2016.

17 Connell 2021, 2.

18 Tuck and Yang 2012.

Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization doesn't have a synonym.¹⁹

Drawing on her book *The Good University*, Connell critically scrutinises different forms of academic labour and “workforces,”²⁰ the *modus operandi* of the global economy of knowledge, in order to carve out and visualise concrete “democratizing projects” of decentred, decolonial academic praxis. One building bloc is to dismantle the “deeply anti-democratic [academic/knowledge] economy,” centred on the global north, with regard to theorising and research methodologies, marked by “extraversion”²¹ and “academic dependency”²² as well as subsequent myopic knowledge productions.²³

Drawing from the seminal work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith and others, Connell writes that decolonial academic practices are linked to democratising knowledge productions.²⁴ Such academic labours are marked by a praxis of decentring – away from a hegemonic, (neo-)imperial centre (read: global north higher education institutions and a centred, hegemonic canon) – through “knowledge from below,” engaging with “new workforce[s]” as well as (re-)thinking methods, language(s) and theoretical lenses involved.²⁵ Such decentring requires a “logic of shifting the meaning of an existing technique” or rethinking a project in research ethical terms within the nexus of “data sovereignty” and concerns for reciprocity when engaging in statistical or census techniques or ethnographic methods, for example.²⁶ Decolonising the academy also requires us to review and revise acade-

19 Tuck and Yang 2012, 3.

20 Connell regards the following forms of academic labour as concrete processes and practices that require a decolonial decentring: (1) “consulting the archive” of existing knowledge produced and our engagement practices, (2) “processes of encounter, the work of engaging with,” (3) “pattering, the work of finding patterns in the material,” (4) “criticizing existing knowledge in the light of patterns (...) or the new encounters” and thus new knowledge evolving as well as (5) “broadcasting results.” All those labours are collective, co-produced in nature and relational, referring to existing bodies of knowledge and encounters made with a variety of “knowledge holders” that are not just academics but all those “knowledge holders” and “bearers of the archive” that our academic knowledge products tap into, people we encounter in this collective, social process. Connell 2021, 3–4.

21 Hountondji as quoted in Connell 2021, 8.

22 Alatas as quoted in Connell 2021, 8.

23 See Maldonado-Torres and his critique of the “idea of a method as a guarantor of truth and knowledge in the sciences” that needs to be transformed to counter epistemicides and epistemic colonisation enabled “by Western methodic knowledge.” Maldonado-Torres 2017, 89.

24 Smith 2021; Connell 2021, 9–11.

25 Connell 2021; Smith 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017.

26 Connell 2021, 9–12.

mic teaching practices and spaces, i.e., our classrooms, curricula and materials, guided by the “principle of curricular justice.”²⁷ But Connell inserts a caveat here: “I don’t think that the invention of canons is really a useful thing. What we need to do is widen the archive that we use, widen our knowledge of the history of knowledge production in whatever area that we are working on.”²⁸

There is much debate on how radical academic decolonisation should take place, what the process of deciding what knowledge(s) to include should look like. How to narrow gaps or address blind spots and decentre hegemonic knowledge archives and teaching practices, and determine what kind of spaces and encounters we need to create, are also key. This is sometimes difficult to establish and navigate across the global north-south divide and beyond, as our own pandemic-related experiences, elaborated in more concrete terms below, demonstrate. Barnett-Nagshineh and Pattathu understand the classroom as a key site, as “an intersectional and affective space, interwoven with the European project of empire.”²⁹ For them, these negotiations about academic decolonisation entail processes of learning and unlearning, marked by “deep awareness and care” and “creating alternative spaces that rethink what it means to be together and exist outside of a colonial and capitalist economic setting.”³⁰

Decolonizing should mean more than just how diverse a curriculum is, or what kind of canon is reproduced in any syllabus but recognize [sic] the ways in which the classroom and disciplines are a part of how the (economic and social) elements of a colonial global system is [sic] maintained and ongoing. The pervasive whiteness of syllabi globally and across disciplines is one way in which colonization never ended. Furthermore, there is an emotional resonance to this, hence demands for decolonization matter at a political and emotional level.³¹

Linda Tuhiwai Smith further highlights an ethics of practice for decolonial research praxis and unsettles concerns of positionality/-ies and responsibilities with the question who can become a principal investigator.³² In a decentring and transformative shift, Smith points out that such research “cannot be done without indigenous community participation,” without shifting power relations in order “to remove power from certain researchers, and certain research

²⁷ Connell 2017, 11.

²⁸ Connell 2021, 13.

²⁹ Barnett-Nagshineh and Pattathu 2021, 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Barnett-Nagshineh and Pattathu 2021, 2.

³² Smith 2021, 6.

methods and approaches, and [to] [...] transfer that power or redistribute power to other modes.”³³

In a recent webinar hosted by a British university in October 2022, Leon Moosavi cautioned listeners that we need to question whether all knowledge production and academic praxis necessarily needs to be decolonial. Or, in the words of Raewyn Connell: We have to carefully reflect on whether we “need to teach an epistemological doctrine to students” and break with hegemonically-centred “pyramid epistemologies,” moving towards concrete practices of “mosaic epistemology, where different knowledge formations are understood to sit alongside each other,” or “solidaristic epistemologies, where there is an attempt to connect and learn from different knowledge formations or different knowledge projects.”³⁴ Connell suggests concrete practices in research-based learning and teaching which are marked by linking and exchanging, which enable mutual learning along Bulbeck’s notion of “braiding the borders.”³⁵ This requires decentred spaces and approaches that may lead to “reshaping existing disciplines,” and demands a different way of teaching, dialogue, mentoring as well as of providing material support, i.e., funding and institutional resources and different materials.³⁶ Moosavi points out:

(...) it is rare for decolonial scholars to turn the decolonial gaze towards ourselves and interrogate our own positionality or scholarship in relation to coloniality (...). I call for ‘decolonial reflexivity,’ which involves decolonial scholars drawing upon theoretical discussions about academic decolonisation to introspectively locate the inadequacies, limitations, and contradictions within our own efforts and academic decolonisation, particularly in relation to the potential for us to inadvertently perpetuate coloniality rather than dismantle it.³⁷

We take a cue from the notion of “decolonial reflexivity”³⁸ when engaging our own experiences with and concerns about academic decolonisation as concrete academic praxis and auto-scrutiny – in terms of curriculum, teaching, research and other practices. We seek to employ the above-mentioned key parameters in our own academic doings, processes of learning and endeavours, to un-/re-learn and when we discuss the spotlights in the subsequent sections of this contribution.

33 Smith 2021, 6; see also Tuck and Yang 2014.

34 Connell 2021, 14.

35 Ibid.

36 Connell 2017, 11–12.

37 Moosavi 2022, 2–3.

38 Moosavi 2022.

In a first concrete step and practice, we interrogate our scopes of decentred, decolonial praxis – whether in terms of curricular or academic publishing concerns, or of epistemological, theoretical, methodological and research ethical knowledge archives and approaches. We also consider who is part of our academic encounter(s) and space(s), understood as “a mixture of people of different geographies, locations and experiences, that come with a range of lived experiences and cultural knowledges” and subsequent diverse positionalities “at complex intersections of power,” which “affects both the kinds of knowledge we seek to embrace and the ways in which we relate to our fieldwork and our classrooms.”³⁹ We strive to interrogate our conduct in pandemic times through the following spotlights as “a practice of conduct in operationalised terms,” what we enable or disable, how we engage with the existing gap between theory and practice of academic decolonisation.⁴⁰

Spotlight 1: Establishing a Protected Work and Mentoring Space

Given the challenges of many early career researchers in taking the first successful steps in academic writing and publishing, we suggested a collective writing process using vignettes as shorter pieces that each working group member would be able to handle, especially given the challenging situation in which most found themselves.⁴¹ These vignettes combine thick descriptions of particular situations with authors’ reflections on specific challenges. They map emerging questions and difficult decisions that we have had to take in times of uncertainty, unpredictability and high levels of anxiety that are marked by ambiguous and shifting rules and restrictions impacting our daily lives, academic encounters and research fields in manifold and diverging ways. The aim was for the vignettes to open a window for fellow research travellers, unveiling specific ground realities that are often messy, fuzzy and characterised by many colours and shades. They would document the everyday challenges of conducting research and producing knowledge. Quite often, such testimonies receive little attention in published research, which is primarily focused on the presentation and discussion of research findings, avoiding discussion of the vulnerabilities, ambivalences,

³⁹ Barnett-Nagshineh and Pattathu 2021, 8.

⁴⁰ Moghli and Kadiwal 2021, 4–6.

⁴¹ See Batool et al. 2021.

dilemmas, and difficult decisions that are part and parcel of our research practices.

When we have to navigate without an unequivocal compass and map, or when our readings are based on blurred sights and missing cues, how are these conditions reflected in our practices? An emerging body of work focused on pandemic research challenges offers no definitive prescriptions or signposts for how to cope with the effects of the pandemic; instead, its authors put forward mitigation strategies that have been developed and improvised, sometimes more and sometimes less successfully, during the pandemic, or in circumstances deemed similar enough to infer from.⁴² Serving as context-specific and grounded examples, the vignettes authored by the work-group members provided critical insights into decision-making procedures while flagging issues and topics that other researchers might have to address under conditions of uncertainty.

An overarching *agraffe* that framed our discussions is how to define ‘the field’ we worked in.⁴³ Where is ‘the field’ located, where are its boundaries and what are its specificities? Can we simply “take the field online”⁴⁴? An interrelated second theme was the challenges and possibilities of digital and remote research, especially if face-to-face data collection and interaction had previously been central to the research projects. What would be the implications of shifting to digital and hybrid approaches or to distance research? How do our frames of reference and possibilities of interpretation and interaction change when remote and digital approaches are employed?⁴⁵ How can researchers, especially those at early stages of their career, when networks are not yet well established and resources are limited, establish initial contacts and keep in touch with participants?⁴⁶ What does rapport-building look like under such conditions?⁴⁷ Moreover, what kinds of silences and exclusions does remote data-generation create, particularly when thinking about marginalised groups and existing as well as newly emerging vulnerabilities in pandemic times? Does remote research offer opportunities to transcend some of the limitations of face-to-face interactions, especially those

⁴² See Fleschenberg and Holz 2021.

⁴³ Our multivocal guest editorial team is aware of the multiple uses of the term ‘field,’ e.g., as a methodological expression or as a theoretical construct or a heuristic (as popularised by the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu). In this paper, we employ the term ‘field’ in the former sense.

⁴⁴ Haque 2021; Shah 2021; Kalia 2021.

⁴⁵ Khan 2021.

⁴⁶ Glattli 2021; Haque 2021; Pal 2021.

⁴⁷ Tareen 2021.

related to the positionalities of the researcher and participants?⁴⁸ A third theme pertained to risk, safety and power. ‘Do no harm’ is a well-established ethical principle that takes on additional meaning during a pandemic because it also raises questions about the transmission of infection, as well as entangled pandemic ramifications such as the compounding of vulnerability and inequality.⁴⁹ Lastly, remote and distance research are not new phenomena, particularly in volatile regions; scholars have routinely relied on ‘research assistants,’ a contested term as such in research ethics and research cooperation. As scholars like Mwambari et al. and Bisoka, among others, have noted, the safety of research assistants, as well as their substantial contribution to the success of research projects, has generally not received sufficient consideration and is part and parcel of power relations within research processes, heightened by the pandemic in particular ways.⁵⁰ In pandemic times, risk assessments for the work of research assistants and that of researchers become even more important. The significance of this question is extensively debated in the context of the power relations between a researcher in the global north or western academia and local co-researchers, located in the fragile institutional context of the global south.⁵¹ This is one of the difficulties highlighted in our working group, given also the diverse positionalities of its members.

A fourth theme that emerged was the mental and emotional well-being of researchers, research assistants and participants. Pandemic-related additional stressors emerged, and existing worries, for instance about delays in project completion, were heightened.⁵² Mental and emotional health, mentoring care and institutional support thus require further tending to, in particular for early-career researchers having to negotiate uncertainty, precarity and anxieties in often difficult circumstances and with limited resources and support networks at hand.

The themes that emerged from our working group discussions and writings are neither entirely novel nor unique, and have been written about. The onset of the pandemic has highlighted their significance, though. The discussions, as well as published reflections of many colleagues, show that it is necessary to engage with these questions more broadly and systematically, rather than reflecting on them as afterthoughts at the end of a chapter. A rereading of the existing body of work might provide fruitful insights, yet we also ask what kinds of reconfig-

48 Khan 2021.

49 Zuberi 2021; Batool 2021.

50 See Mwambari et al. 2021 and Bisoka 2020.

51 Bisoka 2020; see Fleschenberg and Holz 2021.

52 Glattli 2021; Haque 2021; Tareen 2021; Shah 2021.

urations are necessary and possible in drafting decentred, critical and situated social-science research practices.

In addition, the working group as a platform for sharing helped us to process our experiences and to understand that we are not alone in our struggles. What the working group could not offer was the systematic training many working group members were searching for; our time was constrained by institutional structures and we did not have the necessary funding to invite trainers. We were only able to bookmark important general issues to consider while members pondered context-sensitive mitigation strategies individually.

On a larger scale, the pandemic has put many researchers in a paradoxical situation: While funders explicitly require applicants to develop innovative responses to altered conditions, institutionally, funding structures and ethical review procedures remain the same.⁵³

Given these institutional constraints and contradictions, another salient question that resurfaced throughout our discussions as well as in the literature was how to conduct research and produce knowledge differently within the structures in place. The second spotlight thus addresses the possibilities and challenges of slow science and the ethics of care as a key parameter; these are further linked to the third spotlight, which highlights the need for cooperation as a key parameter of a decentred, decolonial and feminist academic practice.

Spotlight 2: Slow Science and Decolonial-Feminist Ethics of Care

Experiences of feeling drained, of pandemic fatigue as well as adjustment of work and personal practices vis-à-vis anxieties and uncertainties were more commonly shared from 2021 onwards, while prominent calls for slow science and an ethics of care emerged within a pandemic “kaleidoscope in terms of change and patterns.”⁵⁴ Zahra Hussain argues that slow science “calls for unsettling the stable typologies drawn from structures of theory and knowledge we are trained in [...], in order to enter the unknown territories” in the “project of academic self-regulation.”⁵⁵ Similarly, Corbera et al. opine that “academic praxis should value forms of performance and productivity that enhance wellbeing and care together

⁵³ Vindrola-Padros 2021, 81–93; Nicholas 2020; Vindrola-Padros et al. 2020.

⁵⁴ Hussain 2020.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

with solidarity and pluralism.”⁵⁶ But how many of us were allowed to slow down, or had the resources and spaces to do so, to imagine and engage slowly, with care? What kinds of spaces of solidarity and (co)mentoring had opened up and been maintained over the past two pandemic years? Which structures and inequalities widened or became more entrenched?⁵⁷ What new vulnerabilities, risks and exposures emerged? Were institutional spaces, curricula and practices re-aligned with the need for slow science and ethics of care, or did this call wither away in the halls of academia once the first, second or third lockdown ended?⁵⁸ Do spaces exist that encourage researchers, students and those we co-research with to share their struggles and set collective goals that are aligned with different needs?⁵⁹ How do we deal with a longing for ‘back to normal’ or a post-pandemic ‘new normal’ in the social sciences?⁶⁰ Lastly, Dunia et al. remind us that a re-orientation and the setting of new standards are not only necessary on the institutional level but are also essential if we mean to incorporate solidarity and decoloniality into our individual practices and decision-making.⁶¹

Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma and Chika Watanabe present us with an interesting proposal in their *Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography*.⁶² They invite us to probe taken-for-granted notions of field and home, footprints and scope of fieldwork practices – not only given that a “return to ‘normal’” might never be possible (or, we add here, may in itself be fundamentally problematic). Taking a decolonial and feminist approach, they call for us to carefully dismantle the black box of the personal-political-professional nexus of knowledge production and innovate “methods and epistemologies to contend with intimate, personal, political, and material concerns” embedded in complex knowledge-production processes. This includes the need to reconceptualise notions of ‘going’ and ‘travelling,’ the ‘field,’ modes of ‘being there’ and maintaining research relationships, new modes of data collection as well as “rethink[ing the] *temporalization* of data collection and analysis.”⁶³ In other words, to “refigure what counts as knowledge and what does not, what counts as research and what does not, and how we can transform reali-

56 Corbera et al. 2020, 192.

57 Harle 2020; Young 2020.

58 De Gruyter 2020; Smith and Watchom 2020.

59 Corbera et al. 2020; Das 2020.

60 Fadaak et al. 2020.

61 Dunia et al. 2020; see also Martin 2021.

62 Günel, Varma and Watanabe 2020.

63 Ibid.

ties that have been described to us as ‘limitations’ and ‘constraints’ into openings for new insights.”⁶⁴

In this context, the collection and analysis of data is a central point of concern. Thus, re-iterating a longstanding decolonial and feminist concern, we call for cooperative research practices.

Spotlight 3: A Plea for Decolonizing Research Collaborations Across and Beyond the Global North-South Divide

Developing modalities of cooperation that avoid extractive data collection, minimise risk for all partners, enable the co-learning and co-production of knowledge, and ensure that the work of all contributors is valued must be done in a sustained, decentred way. It requires rethinking research networks and supervision teams and reviewing bureaucratic procedures, especially those related to budgeting, that place restrictions on how funds are spent.

Linked to questions of positionality and reflexivity and the affective dimensions of ‘field’ and knowledge production are the dynamic power relations between the researcher and already-employed or potential research assistants. The reflections of our vignette authors,⁶⁵ mostly positioned as indigenous outsiders, allow us to go beyond the exploitative relation between the global north researcher and the global south research assistant(s) while remaining conscious of the existing privileges of indigenous outsiders in terms of education, resources, class etc. In line with the concerns of some global south researchers employed in Western academia, the local positionalities of our working group members and writers’ collective demonstrate not only greater sensitivity to the tribulations of using the bodies of research assistants as an instrument in the neoliberal academic machine, they also reinforce the need for empathy and mutual respect, and demonstrate the growing sense of resentment to epistemic and economic violence in the interest of vigorous knowledge production.⁶⁶

Vigorous knowledge production is not possible if relationships between researcher(s) and research assistants are characterised by negative or unevenly

⁶⁴ Günel, Varma and Watanabe 2020; see also Fleschenberg and Castillo 2022.

⁶⁵ Batool et al. 2021.

⁶⁶ See also Baczko and Dorrnsoro 2020; Bisoka 2020; Dunia et al. 2020.

balanced reciprocal relations. Instead, reducing the negative effects of asymmetrical power relations between the researchers and their assistants requires paying attention to the political, cultural, and emotional context in which a research field is located. Researchers must continuously and reflexively challenge their own positionality in terms of privilege (due to socioeconomic status or educational qualification/affiliation, for instance) or power (assuming authority over research design, making decision about methods and the field, analysis of data and dissemination of findings, etc.). We need to cultivate a research ethics based on principles of (com)passion, care and mutuality, and the ability to listen to and work with and alongside diverse fellow travellers. The need for genuine cooperation and coproduction of knowledges⁶⁷ is even more important under pandemic circumstances, which widen and compound structures of inequality (in intersectional terms), vulnerability and injustice.

Academic collaboration entails acknowledging and countering inequalities between partners, because cooperation between global north and global south institutions cannot and does not play out on a level playing field. While it is possible to alleviate some of these (e.g., those related to how knowledge is produced), inequalities related to resources and institutional structures are not easy to overcome. An understanding of the specific circumstances and contexts of all knowledge-production partners is a precondition for meaningful collaboration.⁶⁸ Eloisa Martin notes that, due to discomfort surrounding the topic, access to money and funding, while one of the most important aspects of equitable collaboration, is the least discussed, (others include prestige, field expertise, geographic location, gender and race relations).⁶⁹ However, if funding partners in the global north are also working under precarious conditions because of short-term and part-time contracts, how can they build sustainable and long-term partnerships? How can we justify reproducing precarious labour conditions in global south contexts?

To respond to these questions, embodied reflexivity in relation to the aesthetics of power between researchers in the north and researchers (often, assistants) in the south is fundamental (but largely missing) to appreciating epistemic energies in the field, ethical responsibilities and decolonial praxis. Among other things, the Covid-19 pandemic has reminded us of local researchers' fundamental role as team members,⁷⁰ as well as, equally, their omission from any claims to

⁶⁷ See also Baczko and Dorrnsoro 2020; Bisoka 2020; Corbera 2020; Dunia et al. 2020.

⁶⁸ Martin 2021; DeHart 2020; Gerlach et al. 2020.

⁶⁹ Martin 2021.

⁷⁰ Khan 2021. Local researchers operate as 'brokers,' 'fixers,' 'assistants,' 'research affiliates,' or

knowledge production.⁷¹ A call for transparency in this regard has raised some difficult-to-answer questions. Among others: How to negotiate cross-country or cross-continental institutional incongruences while adhering to an ethics of care, respect and responsibility; How to reduce inequality in such research collaborations? Do responsibilities of the researchers in western academia towards local research team members in the global south not extend beyond the institutional and procedural definitions of care and personal needs of acting out of good conscience? What role does gendered positionality of research assistants play in overall risk-assessment designs, and where do procedural ethics fail?

Some of our working group members often pointed to the discomfort they felt during their interactions in their native localities as their ‘field,’ and their inability to avoid the indifference of locals to western-based or nationally imposed Covid-19 protocols.⁷² During our working group discussions, we noticed that even when local travel and gathering restrictions are relaxed, but with health-safety guidance for meeting in public spaces in place, this might produce an inherent bias against women researchers in gender-segregated communities. For instance, interviews with women can mostly only take place in closed spaces such as homes, offices and educational institutions, where it is hard to observe distancing measures and other safety protocols. The gendered implications of standardised Covid-19 prevention guidance for researchers, and the absence of methodological reflections in the post-covid research methods literature, point towards a promising research avenue with the potential of unsettling these aesthetics of power.

In decolonial terms, a reflexive engagement with relational dynamics between researchers from the global north and local colleagues in the south is a way forward. Some key starting points for this reflexive engagement are: How are risk-assessment rules and principles equally applied, not procedurally but practically, and where has this equality been overlooked and why? Are gender biases and their associated contextual limitations given enough consideration in the design and implementation of research? What tensions emerge between procedural ethics and researchers’ personal commitments to ethics of care, responsibility and transparency? What implications do these tensions have for research design, relying on local partners? How can research experience, as an embodied

‘collaborators’ (Mwambari et al. 2021; Mwambari 2019; Utas 2019). While coordinating a research project from the UK which was being implemented in Pakistan, Salman Khan’s concrete pandemic-related practice of an ethics of care towards team members included, for example, the provision of safe travel for each field visit, working from home at the intensification of a pandemic ‘wave,’ and pre-initiating contacts for local research team members. For details see Khan 2021.

71 Bisoka 2020.

72 Batool et al. 2021; Zuberi 2021.

and affective mode of lived reflexivity, contribute to solidarities against unequal research relationships marked by asymmetrical financial arrangements, hiring and working conditions of local research team members as well as global north-centred universalising (yet to be provincialised) behaviours in (post)pandemic research projects? These guiding questions are central, yet largely understudied, aspects of decolonised knowledge production.

Speaking Back to the Literature – The Digital Turn in the Social Sciences? Issues of Remote Embeddedness and Altered Research Practices

It has become clear that the pandemic has reshaped research phenomena, vocabularies, spaces, tools, relationships and interactions. The extent and the forms and shapes of these reconfigurations remains to be seen. In order to re-calibrate research practices, not only but especially when entangled with pandemic-related (re)productions of inequalities, silences and emergencies, we require an “additional layer of reflexivity,” because “[i]f methods shape how and what we know and are always political... what kind of social realities do we want to create or bring into being?”⁷³ Digital research methods and concerns about navigating research ethics in such contexts are not novel as such.⁷⁴ However, the scope, intensity and scale of a potential digital turn in academia was new when the pandemic hit. In 2020, we were trying to “rethink how many academic practices might take place in virtual environments,”⁷⁵ such as webinars and online conferences, digital research collaborations in multi-sited research teams, or how social media can be used for “the democratization of academic knowledge.”⁷⁶ The pandemic has also highlighted that many ‘traditional’ criteria for ‘good’ fieldwork practices and valid data, such as the need for long-term immersion, require re-consideration. It appears that a digital turn in academic practices and encounters might allow us to bridge financial constraints and time management challenges as well as concerns about sustainability. As we have seen over the course of the pandemic, these promises and opportunities have to be taken with a grain of salt. Among

⁷³ Chowdhury et al. 2020.

⁷⁴ Howell 2021; Tiidenberg 2020; see further Chung et al. 2020; Roberts 2015.

⁷⁵ Carrigan 2020.

⁷⁶ Das and Ahmed 2020.

other aspects, digital and work-from-home scholarship exposes us to a new work-life balance and presents new research-related ethical challenges.

While revising this contribution in late 2022, a reflection on calls and opportunities made at the beginning of the pandemic brings us to conclude that the high hopes seem somewhat dampened. Many of the discussions that gained momentum in 2020 seem to have come to a standstill. Some of the spaces that opened seem to have closed down again, and many of the debates have receded to specialised discussion forums.

One opportunity the pandemic provided was – and still is – to scrutinise the research methods we employ. The travel restrictions, lock-downs, hygiene and social distancing restrictions required researchers whose research activities involve travel and interactions with people to re-think the modes and modalities of knowledge production. The initial, almost default, reaction of many scholars was to enter the ‘field’ through digital and online tools. For many, this meant breaking new ground and soon the realisation hit that a shift from ‘offline’ to ‘online’ research is neither easy nor simple but requires the acquisition of a number of skills and sensitivities that are not intuitive. Scholars who employ digital, rapid, participatory or action research approaches have long struggled with preconceived notions within mainstream debates about online research not measuring up to the gold standard of face-to-face interactions and fieldwork in the physical realm.⁷⁷ The sudden focus on the digital sphere highlighted the relevance of their work and insights. Was everyone suddenly doing online and digital research? In many instances, rather than talking about online research, it might be more appropriate to talk about how scholars entered the ‘field’ via digital means and online tools.

It became apparent that navigating the digital sphere and using online tools requires obtaining new skills.⁷⁸ Various authors and members of our working group noted that they did not know where or to whom to turn to for such training. Few trainings were offered because research institutions generally did not sufficiently acknowledge the gravity of these shifts, and/or because very few people had the relevant skills.⁷⁹ Additionally, during the first few months of the pandemic, no one was sure for how long digitally-mediated and distanced research would persist. This is why scholars as well as institutions were uncertain how much time and resources to invest in skill trainings or technological upgrades. Another issue that received very little attention is the impact of digital and online

⁷⁷ Góralaska 2020; Howlett 2021.

⁷⁸ Góralaska 2020.

⁷⁹ Tareen 2021; Haque 2021; Pal 2021; Christia et al. 2020.

data collection on data analysis and findings. To what extent does the digital and online world constitute a separate ‘field’ from the physical world, and how are they connected?⁸⁰ Is data collected online a substitute for or an addition to already existing data? In what ways would the data require different techniques of analysis and ethics protocols?⁸¹ To what degree should and does the pandemic and its effects figure in research results and findings?

Another opportunity presented by online research is and was easy access to a wider range of people and data. Various scholars caution that digital spaces are “porously bounded, political and power laden.”⁸² It is therefore important to consider silences and absences as well as new forms of inequality resulting from online research and digital scholarship, for both research participants, local co-researchers and researchers themselves. For instance, while digital data provides opportunities for open-access data-sharing,⁸³ what is often not part of the conversation is who collects the timely data and under what kinds of conditions (We addressed the precarious situation of research team members based in global south contexts in the previous section). A related ethical challenge emerging from the rapid expansion of digital and online data collection is to ensure that data is not just extracted from global south contexts without clarifying ownership. Such practices perpetuate dependencies and existing inequalities in the form of data- and techno-colonialism.⁸⁴ Other issues to consider are the traceability of data and informed consent, governmental surveillance technologies of online spaces or hacking of cloud-based collaboration platforms and ambiguous or missing legal frameworks regarding privacy rights and data protection.⁸⁵ In this context, accountability and the transparency of processes and storage solutions are of utmost importance. Most of the data is stored on servers or in clouds that are hosted in the global north. The archives and databases are often only accessible to members of the host university. If sharing options are available, the interfaces for partners who are not based at the host university are often difficult to access and navigate, and the functionality of the platforms is restricted. This was a significant impediment to our collaborative efforts because partners are not on the same technological footing. Funding guidelines appear to move away from equipment and technology-based support, prioritising intellectual and creative

80 Haque 2021; Pulker 2021; Suarez 2023.

81 Gummer et al. 2020; Uprichard and Carrigan 2015.

82 Morrow et al. 2015, 526, 537; Howlett 2021; Górlaska 2020.

83 Guiterrez and Li 2020; Tabasso 2020.

84 Madianou 2019; Chung, Xu and Zhang 2020; Dahmm and Moultrie 2021.

85 See Hantrais et al. 2021; Chowdhry et al. 2020; Madianou 2019; Tabasso 2020.

outputs such as reports, podcasts or art. This increases the dependency of global south scholars on their global north partners in terms of technology.

Our informal conversations with colleagues about digital research practices also point to a different set of limitations and side effects. The pandemic has highlighted the need for safe spaces to voice concerns and discuss what we are working on. Often, these safe spaces emerge during informal conversations and encounters, which must remain a priority. Online interactions can be such safe spaces, but they need to be planned ahead, which adds a layer of formality. Furthermore, going digital is not a feasible or suitable option for all researchers and research projects, and hard-to-reach communities are often even harder to reach.⁸⁶ Looking towards the future, this means it is important to think creatively about fieldwork practices and research designs. For instance, to consider participatory and community-based research approaches,⁸⁷ art-based approaches,⁸⁸ or “patchwork ethnographies,”⁸⁹ piecing together various types of often fragmented data from multiple sources collected through repeated short-term visits and employing a triangulated yet decentred approach for data sources, investigators, methods and ethics of care. We should pay attention to “what forms of knowledge and methodologies emerge *in* and *through* researchers’ life and work commitments.”⁹⁰ Silences and emergencies that were newly configured or compounded due to the pandemic require particular attention in discussions about decolonial academic praxis and academic collaboration.

These were some of the issues that emerged during our working group meetings; they were discussed from interdisciplinary, transregional perspectives as part of a summer term 2022 master class-cum-hybrid lecture series “Digital Research Methods in (Post-)Pandemic Times,” co-coordinated by Andrea Fleschenberg and Salman Khan at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. The course largely centred on the experiences and concerns of early career researchers and provided a protected space for exchange and mentoring as well as critical engagement with existing and newly emerging academic debates and state of the art.

Turning the gaze to ourselves, the co-authors of this article, we were not able to maintain the initial level of exchange and interaction among our working group members. As the months progressed and lockdowns were ended, all working group members got busy with ‘catching-up’ with the work the lockdowns

86 Tareen 2021; Zuberi 2021.

87 Hall et al. 2021; Mitlin et al. 2020.

88 Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2020.

89 Günel, Varma and Watanabe 2020.

90 Günel, Varma and Watanabe 2020; Käihkö 2020; Nicholas 2020; Selim 2020.

had disrupted, and we were consumed with settling back into our old/new lives. Soon we were tied down by routine tasks that came with a return to presence-based teaching and work. We were aware of fallout from the pandemic which manifested itself in many small ways in our professional and private lives. We felt that our lives had been altered by living through the pandemic, however, we did not take time to note and collectively reflect on the content, quality and significance of these changes. Our aim to slow down and offer each other support and safe spaces to vent our fears and difficulties was held up in spirit and in sporadic chats, emails and voice notes, but not in the systematic manner that we had managed to establish in 2020 and 2021.

As of 2022, it appears that many of the debates that were ‘hot’ during the first two years of the pandemic have largely withered away. This also causes frustration. We note an increase in publications on digital research methods and the effects of the pandemic; more courses focussing on digital research methods and online research are being offered. On the institutional level, however, there appears to be little systematic engagement with what we can learn from the past few years.⁹¹ While a number of publications on the pandemic’s impact on health and various social issues have been published, social scientists have not turned their gaze on themselves. A few large-scale studies show that the pandemic has widened the gender gap,⁹² but the pandemic’s impact on existing inequalities within academia requires more attention if we want to decolonise knowledge production.⁹³ To move ahead and learn, we also need more reflection on our everyday practices during the pandemic and our experiences with ‘moving back’ to presence-based work.⁹⁴

Concluding Thoughts

Our practical (in the working group and seminars) and theoretical engagement with key research issues such as how to define the ‘field,’ the challenges of digital and remote research, how to deploy a decolonial-feminist ethics of care towards everyone involved in academic knowledge production, and power dynamics operating within research relationships, bridge the pre- and post-pandemic debates

⁹¹ KNAW 2022.

⁹² Madgavkar et al. 2020; Alon et al. 2020; Flor et al. 2022.

⁹³ Deryugina et al. 2021; Dönmez 2022; Herman 2021; Myers 2020; Higginbotham and Dahlberg 2021.

⁹⁴ Banerjee 2021; Batool et al. 2021; Nikolić 2021.

related to offline, online and hybrid research designs. Dealing with and thinking about intertwined structural, relational, procedural (formal), ethical and emotional challenges underpinning any research design in uncertain times enabled us to reflect upon research designs (offline and online) and their procedural dimensions, institutional frameworks (including procedural guidelines, financial arrangements and support structures), and key challenges in knowledge production. Although our positionalities (those of this chapter's co-authors and of the members of the working group) are diverse and instructive in their own ways, our endeavour has opened up a space for reflection, deliberation and dialogue with academics whose perspectives are not covered in this chapter. For instance, scholars in the global south with no current and past affiliations to universities and institutions in the global north faced these challenges in addition to those created by exclusion and structural inequalities within the global knowledge production system.⁹⁵

Our reflexive engagement with research during and beyond pandemic times raises many significant questions for critical, decentred, and context-sensitive knowledge production related to South Asia and the global south more generally.⁹⁶ Can gendered research geographies and resource-scarce regions be entered (as fields) through digital and remote research methods with a decolonial academic praxis and an ethics of care? Is now a time for questioning (and where possible disobeying), with ever greater intensity, existing procedural ethics frameworks and institutional support structures in place in the global north, and to demand more democratic governance of knowledge production? What emotional strain and constraints do online methods impose upon researchers in western academia (whether from the global south or north) by limiting their capacities to capture epistemic energies “out there” in the contexts that are researched? For a decolonised knowledge production praxis, structural, economic and epistemic violence needs to be challenged. What concrete academic practices – be it in terms of teaching, researching and cooperating – can genuinely and sustainably contribute to this goal beyond purchasing the rhetoric? We leave our readers with these questions, hoping that a more critical reflexive engagement with these issues will result in a response. If it happens, we will consider that this chapter, in which we have shared our pandemic-related experiences, struggles and attempts of cooperation as well as resistance, has served its purpose: to contribute a small

⁹⁵ We thank Fathima Nizaruddin for highlighting this aspect.

⁹⁶ See the special issue “Negotiating Research Ethics in Volatile Contexts,” co-guest-edited by Abida Bano, Rosa Cordillera A. Castillo, Sarah Holz and Andrea Fleschenberg 2022/2023.

piece to a continuous, challenging and yet-to-be amplified debate as well as concrete praxis of decolonial reflexivity and alternative academic praxis.

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