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Global Asymmetric Power Relations - and Us  
Inequalities in Knowledge Production and Exchanges<sup>1</sup>

"Knowledge is power" remains a popular slogan in education and beyond. It aims to motivate learners to acquire knowledge and to apply it for own gains. But while knowledge can be liberating and emancipatory, it can also be oppressive and intimidating, and domesticating. We always need to be aware of who uses which kind of knowledge for which interests and purposes. Like development, knowledge is not neutral. Nor is it value-free. We therefore cannot uncritically affirm and praise knowledge production (and its dissemination) as a relevant aspect of and contribution to development without examining the nature and intention of both, the knowledge created and applied as well as the concept and meaning of development. This also requires that we must (self-)critically explore and question the conditions, forms, substance and likely impact of the knowledge produced. The starting point should not be the result of knowledge production, but the process of producing knowledge. Our hierarchical world is characterized by structural asymmetries as an integral part of the reproduction of societies and institutions. These are structures of power and interest, but also of contestation. Racism, class and gender matter. Which knowledge and development do we want to be part of and what are our visions? We should always be careful and cautious when "universal knowledge" in the singular is the reference point of a "darker side of Western modernity", rather than the "pluriversality" of knowledges.<sup>2</sup> Defining the point of departure, Walter Mignolo stated:

The practice of liberation and de-colonization is initiated with the recognition, in the first place, that the colonization of knowledge and being consisted of using imperial knowledge to repress colonized subjectivities and the process moves on from there to build structures of knowledge that emerge from the experience of humiliation and marginalization that have been and continue to be enacted by the implementation of the colonial matrix of power.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This presentation is based on parts of previous work, in particular "Development and Environment: The Challenges for Research Collaboration In and With Africa", *CODESRIA Bulletin*, nos. 1 & 2, 2016, 10-16; "Knowledge Production and Decolonisation – Not Only African Challenges", *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2018, 4-15; and "Knowledge Production, Ownership and the Power of Definition: Perspectives on and from Sub-Saharan Africa", in Isa Baud/Elisabetta Basile/Tiina Kontinen/Susanne von Itter (eds), *Building Development Studies for the New Millennium*. London: Palgrave Macmillan 2019, 265-287.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke University Press 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Mignolo, "Delinking", *Cultural Studies*, Vol 21, No 2, 2016, 449-514 (here: 492).

In contrast to such an advocated project of deconstructing power relations with the aim of emancipation, “dataism” has emerged as a new currency, pretending to be a revolutionary way of producing knowledge.<sup>4</sup> But it reduces knowledge to a level of algorithms.<sup>5</sup> Such trends not only reinforced an oppressive, anti-humanist version of “modernity”, but also forces us to reappraise knowledge and knowledge production as a process, which involves human interaction on the basis of respect and recognition of “otherness”. By standardizing life on earth as data generating object for decision-making processes, we sacrifice knowledge in other forms, influenced by empathy, social justice and related motives – such as solidarity. If knowledge is not any longer a combination of the multiplicity of experiences but reduced to data processing, then knowledge remains part of a problem instead of searching for and contributing towards a solution.

What we need is to engage in knowledge and development for all as a process of mutual understanding in search of a common future beyond the Anthropocene. An inter-generational social contract, which seeks to honor and respect the dignity of all life on earth. This is a challenge not limited to any particular country but a global task.

The pitfalls of efforts entangled in the complexity of scholarly engagement in a real world characterized by inequalities, asymmetric structures and corresponding hierarchical realities are the focus of this presentation. These are founded, as Standing and Taylor diagnosed in an article in the *IDS Bulletin* of 2007, on the dichotomies between “North and South and the massive imbalances in access to resources that produce ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ in the knowledge economy”.<sup>6</sup>

Given my own scholarly background, I will have to limit my presentation on experiences in the fields of Development and African Studies. Their nature relates to the changing concepts and conceptualizations framing “development”. These can be traced in their evolution of ideologies and narratives since World War II<sup>7</sup> and in more historical depth since the days of the “civilizing mission”.<sup>8</sup> With the Millennium Development Goals as a significant marker and the Sustainable Development Goals as the latest reference point on which much of Development Studies funding depends, the discourse and its focus has entered a new stage which directly affects the role and scope of the discipline. Not only does it shift the premises from a North-South perspective towards one viewing global challenges as a necessary and long overdue adjustment. While the SDG-triggered agenda opens new windows of opportunity, it also closes others, by reducing the notion of development and its goals to a checklist. But Development Studies should not be

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<sup>4</sup> Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus. A Brief History of Tomorrow*. London: Harvill Secker 2016.

<sup>5</sup> “Yuval Noah Harari on big data, Google and the end of the free will”, *Financial Times*, 26 August 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Hilary Standing and Peter Taylor, “Whose Knowledge Counts? Development Studies Institutions and Power Relations in a Globalised World”, *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 47, no. 6, 2016, 169-178 (here: 169) [originally published 2007 in 38(2)].

<sup>7</sup> Richard Jolly and Ricardo Santos, “From Development of the ‘Other’ to Global Governance for Universal and Sustainable Development”, *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 13-32.

<sup>8</sup> Aram Ziai, *Development Discourse and Global History. From colonialism to the sustainable development goals*. London and New York: Routledge 2016.

defined or instrumentalized by policy makers and practitioners who engage in “development”.<sup>9</sup>

In a chapter drafted for a forthcoming new volume of EADI (the European Association for Development Research and Training Institutes), Juan Telleria takes this essentialist approach to global issues to task. He unmasks the underlying narrow understanding of transformation of human societies and of economic, political, and social issues. As he points out, the 2030 Agenda

explains the present in terms of the lack of ability to create the right context for the realization of the human essence. In this sense, the 17 goals and 169 targets would be the means for the transformation of human societies in a way that they enable the full realization of the human potential.

Overall, the essentialist perspective avoids an open debate about global issues.<sup>10</sup>

In another chapter to the same forthcoming volume, our host Aram Ziai warns to be too quickly convinced of having the answers to the problems. As he concludes:

claiming to know better what is good for the people than they themselves would merely lead to assuming the role of the trustees again and reproduce the hierarchies of development discourse. The task ahead is to disentangle the idea of a good society from the model of the industrialized affluent societies. ... people not everywhere want to live like those in the affluent industrial capitalist regions – and thus challenge the paradigm of ‘development’. Alternatives to colonial global capitalism exist.<sup>11</sup>

But let me not further indulge with challenging the ideological foundations of the dominant agenda, rather move closer to home. The following arguments are in support of a “renegotiation of the terms of knowledge production”<sup>12</sup> in the related disciplines of developmental and area studies. By doing so, I side with demands by others<sup>13</sup> that we need to move towards non-hegemonic forms of cooperation between academic realms and forms of knowledge as a practical-material and intellectual task. This is influenced by the conviction that “neutral” knowledge in a value-free vacuum detached from social

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<sup>9</sup> See for an early critique of Agenda 2030 Henning Melber, *Development Studies and the SDGs – Mapping an Agenda*. Bonn: European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes, August 2017 (EADI Policy Paper Series)

<[https://www.eadi.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/EADI/03\\_Publications/EADI\\_Policy\\_Paper/EADI\\_policy\\_paper\\_Melber\\_August\\_2017.pdf](https://www.eadi.org/fileadmin/user_upload/EADI/03_Publications/EADI_Policy_Paper/EADI_policy_paper_Melber_August_2017.pdf)>.

<sup>10</sup> Juan Telleria, “Essential approaches to global issues: the ontological limitations of development studies”, in Kees Biekart/Laura Camfield/Uma Kothari/Henning Melber (eds.), *Deconstructing/Demystifying Development* (preliminary working title), London: Palgrave, forthcoming 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Aram Ziai, “Beyond the Sustainable Development Goals: Post-Development Alternatives”, *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Hana Horáková, “Knowledge production in and on Africa: Knowledge gatekeepers, decolonization, alternative representations”, in Hana Horáková and Katerina Werkman (eds), *Knowledge Production in and on Africa*. Wien: LIT 2016, 21-52 (here: 47).

<sup>13</sup> See for example Wiebke Keim, Ercüment Celic, Christian Ersche, and Veronika Wöhrer (eds), *Global Knowledge Production in the Social Science. Made in Circulation*. Oxon: Routledge 2014.

interests does not exist: ways of knowing and resulting bodies of knowledge are always historical and political.<sup>14</sup>

By pointing to the relevance of hierarchical structures and power, I concur with Halvorsen that, “the academic profession must rid itself once and for all of the notion that knowledge is invariably ‘positive’, that every question has one correct answer (the truth), and that this is to be obtained through one correct method”.<sup>15</sup> This demands a critical self-reflection and honest assessment of our understanding of and role in research and the forms of interaction with social realities and scholars in and from the so-called global South. True decolonization should have a critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform research practices. We should always interrogate our own internalized value systems, which we often tend to understand and apply unchallenged as the dominant (if not only) norm.

Global asymmetric relations have many faces. They are not only manifested in unequal terms of trade, a dominance of the world market by industrialized countries and their economies, worldwide growing inequalities and the continued control over and exploitation of natural resources in so-called less developed countries mainly serving the interest of various external agencies (largely in the private corporate sector) and local elites. Structural dependencies and their effects on current societies are visible in production and ownership of knowledge too, similar to many other forms of open or hidden dominance in the past still existing in the present.

The slogan that “knowledge is power” is visibly reproduced in the landscape in which we navigate as scholars and practitioners. While this dictum is not new, it has a more pronounced meaning nowadays through new information technologies and media reinforcing comparative advantages among those who apply knowledge as power. But there is a flip side to this widely accepted truism. As Broadbent alerts us in an article posted by “The Conversation”, academics “are much happier asserting that knowledge is power than they are conceding that power is knowledge”.<sup>16</sup> But if we are serious about partnership and emancipation, we have to carefully scrutinize not only how knowledge is power, but also how power is effective in terms of knowledge – not least also in the definitions and framings applied. Knowledge in its current dominant forms includes epistemic violence. More on this later on.

“Knowledge Divides” was not by accident the sub-title of the World Social Science Report 2010 published by UNESCO and the International Social Science Council. Its

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<sup>14</sup> Berit Bliesemann de Guevara and Roland Kostic, “Knowledge production in/about conflict and intervention: finding ‘facts’, telling ‘truth’”, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol 11, No 1, 2017, 1-20 (here: 6).

<sup>15</sup> Tor Halvorsen, “International co-operation and the democratization of knowledge”, in Tor Halvorsen and Jorun Nossun (eds), *North-South Knowledge Networks. Towards equitable collaboration between academics, donors and universities*. Cape Town: African Minds and Bergen: UIB Global 2016, 277-309 (here: 303).

<sup>16</sup> Alex Broadbent, “It will take critical, thorough scrutiny to truly decolonize knowledge”, *The Conversation*, 1 June 2017 <<https://theconversation.com/it-will-take-critical-thorough-scrutiny-to-truly-decolonise-knowledge-78477>>.

chapters four and five provide sobering evidence to the fact that the current internationalization – like its preceding stages – tends to reinforce the dominance of the North. In as much as economic disparities were integral parts of the unequal development on a global scale (re-)produced since the days of colonial-imperialist expansion, the world of science and knowledge production displays similar characteristics of inequality. As a result, “differences in the research methods and funding between Western and Africanist academia highlight the presence of severe global inequalities in the knowledge economy”, as Nic Cheeseman and others concluded in their Notes on Research in Africa.<sup>17</sup> Scientific dependence in Africa, dubbed by the African philosopher Paulin Hountondji as “extraversion”<sup>18</sup>, refers to the fact that African scholarly production is oriented towards an overseas public. It corresponds with and is an integral part of the structurally anchored socio-economic imbalances.<sup>19</sup> A report on the fortieth anniversary of The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) observed:

That knowledge has been *colonized* raises the question of whether it was ever free. The formulation of knowledge in the singular already situates the question in a framework that is alien to times before the emergence of European modernity and its age of global domination, for the disparate modes of producing knowledge and notions of knowledge were so many that *knowledges* would be a more appropriate designation.<sup>20</sup>

“Unfortunate, but undeniable”, states Ahsan Kamal, “the Academy is the North”.<sup>21</sup> The vested interests and networks rooted in a Northern hemisphere ensure that citation gaps result in further marginalization and gatekeeping, since “certain voices do not command attention”.<sup>22</sup> International bibliometric databases document the bias, testifying to “the common ignorance of the African publication sector in Philadelphia, Cambridge and Paris alike”.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, Southern-based journals in the social sciences disclose a vast inter-disciplinary and multi-faceted world of discourses representing a wide panorama of locally based reflections. These are not confined to some irredentism but add insights to a relevant local as well as to a globally (or universally) relevant debate.

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<sup>17</sup> Nic Cheeseman, Carl Death and Lindsay Whitfield, “Notes on Researching Africa”, *African Affairs*, 6 March 2017, DOI: 10.1093/afraf/adx005 (here: 4).

<sup>18</sup> Paulin J. Hountondji, “Scientific dependence in Africa today”, *Research in African Literature*, Vol 21, No 3, 1990, 5-15.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Weingart, “Knowledge and inequality”, in Göran Therborn (ed.), *Inequalities of the World. New theoretical frameworks, multiple empirical approaches* (pp. 163-190). London: Verso 2006, 163-190.

<sup>20</sup> Adebayo Olukoshi, “African scholars and African Studies, in Henning Melber (ed), *On Africa. Scholars and African Studies. Contributions in Honour of Lennart Wohlgemuth*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute 2007, 7-22 (here: 17).

<sup>21</sup> Ahsan Kamal, “Some Thoughts on Reconfiguring Epistemology: Location, Authenticity and Value”, *International Quarterly for Asian Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 3-4, 2020, 71-74 (here: 73).

<sup>22</sup> Ryan C Briggs and Scott Weathers, “Gender and Location in African Politics Scholarship: the other white man’s burden?” *African Affairs*, Vol. 115, No. 460, 2016, 466-489 (here: 470).

<sup>23</sup> Wiebke Keim, “Social sciences internationally – the problem of marginalisation and its consequences for the discipline of sociology”, *African Sociological Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2008, 22-48 (here: 30).

Given such Northern hegemony, the meaning of relevance must be interrogated. Adebayo Olukoshi, then regional director for Africa and West Asia at the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, questioned at the Times Higher Education Africa Universities Summit in 2016 the notion of “world class” as seemingly global currency. As reported, he argued:

The mistake which we made over time has been to assume there is a defined standard of excellence, by which we must measure ourselves. Excellence itself is a changing concept and today’s universities in Africa must speak to the goals of transformation. We have an opportunity to establish a much more nuanced and considered definition of ambition that speaks to our context.<sup>24</sup>

By engaging with both northern and southern development discourses, Ndhlovu suggests that “perhaps the answer might as well lie in a judicious and innovative combination of previous and emerging theoretical traditions from both the Global North and the Global South”.<sup>25</sup> This, however, although it seems to be common sense, should not lose sight of who acts in which capacity in the process of seeking new ground and drawing the demarcations. There is a need to challenge the established ranking system indicators guided by purely Western criteria. These overlook that,

... co-operation across the globe, *including* with institutions that are rated poorly in existing ranking systems, holds the potential to open up and renew global knowledge systems. Rather than increasing standardization and uniformity, we need to harness the creativity to which a multitude of experiences allow us access.<sup>26</sup>

Current collaboration between policy makers, development agencies, and funding institutions in the spheres of research, including the involvement and role of scholars, offers differing results and conclusions. The tricky part – often not explicitly reflected upon - is the (self-)critical exploration; to which extent European or Western frameworks are considered universal and/or taken simply for granted as being hegemonic when it comes not only to applied science but also to best practices. This at times is the invisible hand shaping exchanges within the frame of an interaction guided by mindsets not (yet) emancipated from or even aware of the paternalistic and patronizing undercurrents of what is considered our world of knowledge. Paul Collier has bluntly expressed the predatory view, considering the raw data in Africa as a matter for harvesting and culling for the main benefit of those from the outside:

Africa is a gold mine to economists, because its economic history has been so extreme. Booms, busts, famines, migrations. Because there are so many African countries, often following radically different economic policies, Africa offers a

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<sup>24</sup> Ellie Bothwell, “African universities must be ‘audacious’ to transform continent”, *Times Higher Education*, 7 May 2016 <<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/african-universities-must-be-audacious-to-transform-continent>>.

<sup>25</sup> Finex Ndhlovu, “Southern development discourse for Southern Africa: linguistic and cultural imperatives”, *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2017, 89-109 (here: 91).

<sup>26</sup> Halvorsen, 280f., original emphasis.

diversity ideally suited to the comparative approach which is the economist's best substitute for the controlled experiment.<sup>27</sup>

This points also to the continued abuse of researchers in insecure zones, who through their field research, often under high personal risks, facilitate knowledge production without any adequate acknowledgement. Dubbed as “fixers”, they are recognized in the keynote presented by Maria Eriksson Baaz.<sup>28</sup>

A survey compiled by two members of the EADI Executive Committee some years ago reconfirmed what many (though far from all) involved in these processes have realized. Based to a large extent on interviews with practitioners, the findings document that research partnerships “are far from immune to the tensions and conflicts permeating unequal power relations accruing from unequal access to funding, knowledge and expert networks”.<sup>29</sup> This is a reminder that international cooperation – even with the best of intentions – is far from being *per se* good. Well-meaning engagement does not protect from flaws, setbacks, and failures in terms of asymmetric forms of cooperation. “North-South partnership” (seldom called South-North partnership) in the true sense of the word requires careful and critical self-reflections especially (though not exclusively) by those from the North entering the minefield but trying to avoid being trapped on all sorts of common devices related to paternalism or racism (and, for that matter, gendered discrimination). These flaws are also visible in the often-praised Nordic or Scandinavian forms of development cooperation considered for quite some time as positive examples. Its inegalitarian, in tendency paternalistic and patronizing structures have been exposed by Maria Eriksson Baaz in a study on local project collaboration in East Africa.<sup>30</sup>

Being international in nature, outlook and practice does not mean being automatically safe from or immune to bias. Something international in nature and organization is far from necessarily all-inclusive, securing adequate representation. All too often internationalism in its basic characteristics and regarding its main beneficiaries is confined to countries and people inside the circle of power – in contrast to those remaining at the margins or outside and on the receiving end.

The EADI paper already mentioned had pointed at the structural constraints, which often lead to an instrumentalization of southern partners, tasked to become implementers of a northern agenda. Put differently: if European or Western or Northern

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Collier. “Africa and the study of economics”, in R H Bates, V Y Mudimbe and J F O’Barr (eds), *Africa and the disciplines – the contributions of research in Africa to the social sciences and humanities*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1993, 58-82 (here: 58).

<sup>28</sup> See on the subject (with contributions by Maria Eriksson Baaz) the forthcoming volume edited by Oscar Abedi Dunia, James B M Vincent and Anju Oseema Maria Toppo, *Facilitating Researchers in Insecure Zones: Towards a More Equitable Knowledge Production*. London: Bloomsbury 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Gilles Carbonnier and Tiina Kontinen, *North-South Research Partnerships: Academia Meets Development?* Bonn: EADI 2014 (EADI Policy Paper Series), 3. See also Gilles Carbonnier and Tiina Kontinen, “Institutional Learning in North-South Research Partnerships”, *Revue Tiers Monde*, No. 221, 2015, 49-162.

<sup>30</sup> Maria Eriksson Baaz, *The Paternalism of Partnership: A Postcolonial Reading of Identity in Development Aid*. London: Zed 2005.

or any other type of internationalism exercises a power of definition over others and imposes its values, norms, mindsets and views as particular (in this case Eurocentric) project on the rest of the world - as done far too long in the history of European colonial and imperialist expansion -, then this international dimension of European frameworks is of dubious value at least for others. So-called progressive political-philosophical ideologies and perspectives rooted in Western trajectories are by no means secure scaffolding.

This does not prevent challenges also from within the belly of the beast, as already articulated by representatives of the 'Radical Enlightenment'.<sup>31</sup> The Enlightenment always had the ambiguity to establish on the one hand a rationality, which promoted a pseudo-scientific belief in mono-causal, linear progress and development as all-embracing concept to explain and master the world, while at the same time providing the tools and instruments for emancipation based on questioning this claim. The era of Enlightenment to a large extent established a smokescreen to cover Eurocentric dominance through claims of universality. But the legitimizing humbug of such claims has been questioned not only by those raised at the receiving end of such an introvert, self-centered mindset, but also by some socialized within the system and supposed to be an integral part of its reproduction. Emancipation from hegemony, power and subjugation is a collective effort, which crosses boundaries and is internationalism in practice.

Being European or Northern or of any other descent therefore does mold but not pre-determine worldview and convictions, even though cultural and religious factors, gender and pigmentation (and the privileges accompanying the social positioning of many scholars in the Northern hemisphere) should not be dismissed lightly in forming identities and mindsets. But primary experiences and socialization do not exclude or deny processes of learning, changing, adapting, and re-positioning. A continued supremacy of American-European social sciences does not offer scholars any excuses to abstain from joining counter-hegemonic strategies also from within the dominant spheres of influence and knowledge production. True partnership in research and knowledge production should in principle be able to overcome boundaries.

The authors of the EADI paper identified the notion of power as a necessary challenge in efforts to transform research into "transformational" research on global issues. Arguing that "there is no such thing as a-political research" they suggest: "Partnerships are embedded in a web of power relations while development-oriented research often implies conflicting and contesting objectives between scholars, aid agencies and development practitioners".<sup>32</sup> This requires efforts creating an enabling environment for more equal partnerships, guided by the need to deconstruct an agenda claiming to be global, but in actual fact still being largely driven by actors in the North. All too often,

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<sup>31</sup> See the three volumes edited by Jonathan I Israel: *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001; *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006; and *Democratic Enlightenment. Philosophy, Revolution and Human Rights 1750-1790*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Carbonnier and Kontinen 2015, 159.



such efforts remain confronted with the dilemma, that even with the best intentions, these are still based on and dependent upon Northern funding and scholars. They might try to overcome structural constraints but remain confined to operations rooted and embedded within a Northern setting. These undertakings often have hardly any direct Southern participation – neither in terms of funding nor through individual and institutional representation.

Southern partners – individuals as well as institutions – remain at the receiving end as implementing agencies, often added on after decisions are taken without adequate consultation during the process. At best, they are invited to indicate their willingness to enter such forms of cooperation in funding applications, in which they had no say during the drafting process, to create the impression that this is about true partnership – while it clearly is not if ownership is one- or lop-sided. This brings back the issue of “scientific power”, which Elisio Macamo problematizes as “the power to define what Africa’s problems are and to claim the supremacy of the solutions that science suggests while, at the same time, undermining local problem definitions and solutions.”<sup>33</sup>

As suggested, declared awareness of the asymmetrical North-South relations does not eliminate the risk that these are perpetuated even within the settings of those claiming to be aware, as long as historically rooted animosities and structural legacies as well as internalized value systems and behavioral patterns prevail. The EADI survey identified in conclusion

... large gaps between stated ambitions and actual practice regarding research partnerships. Under the drive of ‘global studies’ and the global public goods agenda, research organizations with no previous exposure in North-South collaboration are joining in and face many of the traditional pitfalls well-known in international development cooperation, such as basic contextual understanding, cultural sensitivity and a need to explicitly address the issue of power relations, all of which remain central to the success of such research collaboration.<sup>34</sup>

Some European based funding institutions have not only realized such hampering impacts (which also limit the insights created) but are actively taking initiatives to counteract continued reproduction of biased and lop-sided collaboration, which often hardly merits the name. Such examples indicate that funding structures and policies not only matter but can be changed. If North-South partnerships are taken seriously, benefits must be allocated to all involved in a fair manner. This includes the need to ensure that the accumulated knowledge does not only end up in Northern domains and for target groups with privileged access.

Bridging the North-South divide more fundamentally, however, remains a challenge. Academic criteria guiding career planning in a scholarly environment – such as the

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<sup>33</sup> Elisio Macamo, “‘Before we start’: science and power in the constitution of Africa”, in Maano Ramutsindela, Giorgio Miescher and Melanie Boehi (eds), *The Politics of Nature and Science in Southern Africa*. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien 2016, 323-334 (here: 331).

<sup>34</sup> Carbonnier and Kontinen 2015, 160.

infamous “impact factor” of publications – often overrule practical or even policy relevance, and North-South cooperation remains all too often in the hands of Northern partners with Southern counterparts as a fig leaf or a junior partner reduced to an implementing agency for local empirical studies and data collection, which after completion of the local services are owned by the Northern “big brother/sister”.

As a result, relevant insights for local policymakers and communities in the South generated by new research end up in peer reviewed journals, whose commercial publishing priority makes access prohibitively expensive for those who might benefit most from it. Often, funded research projects are not even tasked or expected to share their insights with a wider audience as the potential beneficiary of the new knowledge created. Instead, one could make provisions that research results are published in accessible ways in a local context and provide the necessary funding for this as an integral part of the project. This would be a deliberate effort to address the imbalances by putting money where the mouth is and seeking out locally institutionalized, inter-active fora.

Such interaction would also require a paradigm shift towards the plurality of theories, including a “Theory From the South”.<sup>35</sup> Over and above such fundamental shifts, there remains a need to equate sustainability with notions of justice, equality and civil as well as political and socio-economic rights for individuals and collectives within a world of cultural and religious diversity, impacting on and shaping norms and values as well as life perspectives. This requires pursuing the same goals with different but complementary responsibilities to transcend not only geographical borders but also mental and narrow disciplinary confines, while paying respect and giving recognition to diversity and otherness when seeking and establishing common ground.

Hamid Dabashi is among the many who criticize dominant forms of Western knowledge executing the power of definition.<sup>36</sup> Challenging the uncritical admiration and celebrity status of almost exclusively European thinkers elevated to the commanding heights of universal philosophy and history, he wonders “what happens with thinkers who operate outside the European philosophical ‘pedigree?’” and points to “a direct and unmitigated structural link between an empire, or an imperial frame of reference, and the presumed universality of a thinker thinking in the bosoms of that empire”. While his further challenges do not present simple answers to a complex reality, they invite further fruitful and stimulating (controversial) exchanges.<sup>37</sup> After all, as Pankaj Mishra maintains: “that old spell of universal progress through western ideologies – socialism

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<sup>35</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Theory from the South or, How Euro-America is Evolving toward Africa*. London: Paradigm 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Hamid Dabashi, “Can non-Europeans think? What happens to thinkers who operate outside the European philosophical ‘pedigree?’” *Al Jazeera*, 15 January 2013 <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/01/2013114142638797542.html>>.

<sup>37</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *Can Non-Europeans Think?* London: Zed 2015.

and capitalism - has been decisively broken”<sup>38</sup>, since “Europe no longer confidently produces, as it did for two centuries, the surplus of global history”.<sup>39</sup>

Maybe this is a significant part of the ultimate challenge: to question our preconceived ideas and values molded in Eurocentric and other forms of ethnocentric, in the end anthropocentric socialization and perception, guiding – often unconsciously – our interaction also in scholarly endeavors. We need, as Horáková suggests, to “trouble problematic narratives and discourses that are pervasively shared in the West, as well as within Africa”, deconstruct discourses to challenge and stop “gatekeepers of knowledge ... viewing the exogenous and endogenous models of knowledge production as monolithic (...) to move the debate beyond the binary of Western knowledge vs. local, or indigenous knowledge/worldviews”.<sup>40</sup> This would contribute to eroding orthodoxy and fundamentalisms in their diverse forms of articulation, impacting social and political realities in all parts of our world. At the same time, this is far more than a cognitive challenge: “an alternative epistemology cannot solve the structural symbolic violence displayed among worldviews and forms of knowledge by itself; therefore, any dialectical hermeneutic needs to be combined with a critical theory of society and power”.<sup>41</sup>

Scholars from the global South, aware of and sensitized by the history of marginalization and dehumanization inherent to our dominant worldviews also penetrating academic discourses and paradigms, might have more to offer than many scholars from other parts of the world. Interaction by listening and learning might help us to become more aware in creating a social contract also in academia, which pursues the ultimate justification of scholarly engagement: to find ways and means to generate and apply knowledge (at times also in the form of simple insights) that is able to contribute to a better world. As the introduction to a Bulletin of the Institute for Development Studies suggested:

Development needs to be reframed from narrowly tackling poverty and vulnerability, to navigating complex challenges in ways that reduce inequalities and build more sustainable, inclusive and secure futures for people and societies. We need a universal framing of development that recognises these challenges as matters for everyone, everywhere, from London to Lagos, from South England to the sub-Saharan, and Brighton as well as Beijing.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Pankaj Mishra “The western model is broken”, *The Guardian*, 14 October 2014

<<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/14/-sp-western-model-broken-pankaj-mishra>>.

<sup>39</sup> Pankaj Mishra, “After the Paris attacks: It’s time for a new Enlightenment”, *The Guardian*, 20 January 2015 <<http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/jan/20/-sp-after-paris-its-time-for-new-enlightenment>>.

<sup>40</sup> Horáková, 46.

<sup>41</sup> Felipe Lagos, “Review: Global Knowledge Production in the Social Sciences. Made in Circulation”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 30 March 2015 <https://www.theoryculturesociety.org/blog/review-keim-et-al-global-knowledge-production-in-the-social-sciences>.

<sup>42</sup> Alia Aghajanian and Jeremy Allouche J, “Introduction: Development Studies – Past, Present and Future”, *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2016, 1-12 (here: 6).

What could be a nobler goal, than to promote development understood as to redirect and ultimately stop the race to the wall in a cul-de-sac? A rat race, which based on an anthropocentric obsession reduces the totality of our world to the status of an environment suiting some more privileged members of humanity – ultimately not only promoting rather sooner than later the extinction of the human species but contributing to the end of all life on Earth.

EADI might play a role as mediator and facilitator to provide a forum encouraging robust individual scrutiny among scholars to explore, investigate and question our socialization, mindset, values and practices, if these are indeed compatible with such a new social contract – and if not, to dare contributing to change by changing our own perceptions and activities in the first place. That is “development” as decolonization in a very fundamental and personal way.

But a cautious final word on the currently popular currency of development as decolonisation needs to be added. The Zimbabwean-South African scholar Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, now at the University of Bayreuth, urged “rethinking thinking” to bring about a pedagogy on unlearning “as part of epistemological decolonisation which results in the removal of that colonial/Eurocentric hard disc of coloniality together with its software”.<sup>43</sup> But this is easier said than done given the complexities of existing power structures – and more often than we realise, our own affirmative involvement is determined by the mere position we occupy and the role we execute, whether we like it or not. Therefore, it is necessary to throw a spanner in the current spinning wheel of popular demands for decolonisation. – Not to obstruct them, but to point at the pitfalls and traps.

Given the complexities of existing power structures, more often than we realise, our own affirmative involvement is determined by the mere position we occupy and the role we execute. As scholars and educators we are part of formal socialisation processes in a given society bears the risk of being instrumental in a process of domestication. Coloniality, as Walter Mignolo and others insist, is a project transcending but not eradicating Western universal rule. As Mignolo declared in an interview, it “requires actors and institutions, and actors and institutions conserve, expand, change the structure of knowledge but within the same matrix: the colonial matrix of power”.<sup>44</sup> And Ndlovu-Gatsheni maintains: “The reality is that colonialism was never an event. It has always been a power structure with far-reaching consequences”.<sup>45</sup>

Wahbie Long in the Department of Psychology at the University of Cape Town warns us of the all too uncritical affirmation of postcolonial theory.<sup>46</sup> As he observes:

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<sup>43</sup> Sabelo J. Ndlovu Gatsheni, “The Dynamics of Epistemological Decolonisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Towards Epistemic Freedom”, *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2018, 16-45 (here: 42).

<sup>44</sup> “Interview – Walter Mignolo/Part 2: Key Concepts”, *E-International Relations*, 21 January 2017 <<https://www.e-ir.info/2017/01/21/interview-walter-mignolopart-2-key-concepts/>>.

<sup>45</sup> Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “On Gladiatory Scholarship”, *Review of African Political Economy Blog*, 20 May 2021 <<https://roape.net/2021/05/20/on-gladiatory-scholarship/>>.

<sup>46</sup> Wahbie Long, “Decolonising higher education: postcolonial theory and the invisible hand of student politics”, *New Agenda: South African Journal of Social and Economic Policy*, Vol. 69, 2018, 20-25.

“decolonisation seals us within a colonial imaginary in which the binaries of coloniser and colonised, white and black become impossible to displace”. For him, “decolonisation activists, by and large, do not seem to take issue with the instrumentalization of their education. ... Instead of a materialist reading of the asymmetries of academic life, they support a decolonisation agenda that centres on the notion of *epistemic violence*”. Such discourse, however, “forms the ideological superstructure of an identity project”. The focus on epistemic violence risks to reduce - if not ignore - the underlying dimensions of material facts and realities. By denying appreciation of the mind of others, postcolonial theory “cannot provide the moral vision we need”.

Long refuses reconciling “to a theory whose practices would rehumanise some by dehumanising others”, a process in which “identity becomes the basis for political mobilisation as the possibility of universal comradeship disintegrates”. Such approach, however, has certain consequences: “Whether unable or unwilling to frame their struggle in terms of the universal values of dignity, security and equality, protestors have opted for the particulars of white privilege and black pain, practicing a form of identity politics”. This replaces universal values by specific ones and is ultimately in the way of alliances by like-minded willing to change the world.

Concerns of that kind offer a useful sensitisation – namely that the awareness of the asymmetric North-South (or any other given) power relations does not eliminate the risk of perpetuating these, even within the settings of groups who claim to oppose them. Their re-positioning might risk entanglement in new pitfalls: Hamid Dabashi for example, who teaches Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, points out that so-called progressive political philosophical trajectories are by no means secure scaffolding. With reference to the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek he warns that such philosophy does not protect from falling prey to “the discrete charm of European intellectuals”.<sup>47</sup> But the same is true the other way around: cultivating the anti-European/Western counter narratives is no guarantee to effectively dismantle and remove the disparities of power applied.

These cautionary reflections resonate with Frantz Fanon’s emphatic conclusion in *Black Skin, White Masks*: “I want the world to recognise, with me, the open door of every consciousness”.<sup>48</sup> A search for a truly emancipatory interaction therefore requires a paradigm shift towards the plurality of experiences, practices, knowledges, and theories. This requires transcending not only geographical borders but also the plurality of other confines we have internalised, while paying respect and giving recognition to diversity in efforts seeking and establishing common ground. Unfortunately, this leads to another challenge: how do we recognise otherness without othering?

Having said all this and sounding as if I knew best, I would like to end with what for me seems most important in an approach to decolonisation: we have to start with ourselves

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<sup>47</sup> Hamid Dabashi, “The Discrete Charm of European Intellectuals”, *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, Vol 3, No 4, 2009 <<http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/view/220/314>>.

<sup>48</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press 1967, 232 (French original 1952).

and within us first. As I emphasised at the beginning, we are all colonial subjects alike. Socialised in unequal societies based on hierarchies, we have internalised fundamentals which contribute to the reproduction of these societies. This does not mean we are predetermined. We have choices. As scholars we are supposed to analyse and reflect. And knowledge is indeed power – it only depends which knowledge is used for what power. This requires self-critical explorations and reflections and a change in perceptions and subsequent approaches to what we do and how we do it. We need to interrogate the knowledge we acquired and apply and question if knowledge is indeed wisdom. We need to change attitudes and behaviour. We must start with us. And we need to learn - to more often listen than to talk. That's why I should stop here.

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