

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 features, 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.

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