

Elísio Macamo and Nahed Samour

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

Moderated by Claudia Derichs and edited by Andrea Fleschenberg*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 Ibid., 219–20.

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

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

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

4 Ouédraogo, Diawara and Macamo 2018.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷ Berger 1972, e.g. 46.

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

⁹ See Said 1989.

¹⁰ Said 1989, 219–20.

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

¹² See also Michaels and Salaymeh 2022.

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

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

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

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

¹³ For details see Bogdandy 2020.

¹⁴ Ibid.

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

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

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

¹⁵ BVerfG 2021.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁸ hooks 1999, 309.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Said 1989, 319, 210.

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

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

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

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

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

²¹ Ayyash 2021.

²² Tzuberi and Samour 2022.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Concluding Reflections After the Conversation

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

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

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

²⁶ Macamo 2016.

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

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

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²⁷ Anonymous 2020.

²⁸ Tuck and Yang 2012.

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

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