Decolonial-Feminist Approaches in Teaching and Research: Exploring Practices, Interactions and Challenges

Research Note

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Abstract

In international academic interactions we encounter inequalities of different kinds between the so-called Global North and the Global South. Many of these are the result of a general white male superiority that has existed for centuries as well as the physical and mental colonialisation of the Global South. This paper is a joint critical contemplation by four female researchers reflecting upon the status quo in academic practices. The paper describes surmountable and apparently insurmountable injustices using examples from everyday life in teaching and research. The authors furthermore describe some of their experiences in applying decolonial and feminist approaches and methodologies to achieve an academic togetherness with all partners on an equal footing and report on the challenges and drawbacks they have faced. The authors see this as a process in which they learn, revise and reflect upon their everyday academic lives.

Keywords: Decolonial approaches, feminist approaches, Global South, knowledge production, transregional perspective

Mapping the terrain

This research note started as a journey of a new team growing together at the Chair for Transregional Southeast Asian Studies at the Institute for Asian and African Studies at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin since late 2018. In this research note we aim to explore our practices, interactions and challenges of academic teaching and research that have not only been an inherent part of our commitment to critical, decentred knowledge production but are also part of the practices of New Area Studies as an approach. Such practices are also

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an outcome of our own academic biographies and decisions for teaching and research practices within and beyond disciplinary angles. Through the three signposts "Academic Teaching", "Academic Research" and "Academic Togetherness" we attempt to highlight why critical, decentred knowledge productions are essential in order to address desiderata in research methodology and research ethics emerging from a positivist understanding of "neutral" scientific inquiry, understood as the foundation of scientific rigour and scrutiny. Furthermore, such decentred knowledge productions are entangled with the politics underpinning academic knowledge productions across the globe and with the power differences among those positioned in the Global North and those in the Global South. As Walter Mignolo (2009: 160)[1] stresses:

> By setting the scenario in terms of geo- and body-politics I am starting and departing from already familiar notions of "situated knowledges". Sure, all knowledges are situated and every knowledge is constructed. But this is just the beginning. The question is: who, when, why is constructing knowledges [...].

Committed to a transregional perspectivity[2] and interdisciplinary approaches to critical, decentred knowledge productions, we were nevertheless initially trained from distinct disciplinary angles such as peace and conflict studies, international development studies/global studies, linguistics, political science and gender studies. We engage in studying phenomena in diverse areas that are not the ones in which we grew up and were socialised, meaning that we cannot read and navigate within them as an indigenous knowledge maker could. Having said that, for all of us the "field" is not positioned outside as the "other" – a place or a site to which one travels in order to engage in academic inquiries. Academic knowledge productions – whether in teaching, research or in activities of knowledge transfer via community outreach – are fields in themselves; they are entangled with one another, speaking with, to, about and against one another at times.[3] Always being part of diverse and often entangled fields (see Knapp 2014: 16) our knowledge productions require careful and continued contextualisation, negotiations of our own positionalities and a complex intersectional matrix of power-cum-inequality within and across fields, including academia and our university. Before we start diving deeper into the actual matter of this note, we should provide some introductory re-

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1   See also Jackson 2019.

2   Through such a transregional perspectivity we aim to engage with "the wide variety of social, political, cultural, ontological, epistemic, emotional and economic relations that stretch beyond the regional borders of Southeast Asia. Particular attention is given to trans- and pluri-local connectivities. As for example between Southeast Asia and the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) or between East, South and Southeast Asia. [...] [We position ourselves with our respective subject fields within] New Area Studies in the sense of a consistent understanding of Europe and the West as one area among many and reconfigure the concept of 'area'. Our studies use local and analytical approaches and concepts; we apply a critical perspective on hegemonic knowledge production" (IAAW 2020).

3   For a detailed discussion see Knapp 2014, whose critique of othering the field, while not identifying academia as a field in itself (socially constructed and culturally situated also in terms of power and inequality), we follow here.

marks on who we are and the positions from which we are speaking and exploring our practices.

Although we are a diverse group, all of us employ decolonial and/or feminist toolboxes (cf. De Sousa Santos 2008, 2018; Chilisa 2012; Denzin et al. 2008).[4] Andrea Fleschenberg has been living this approach for the past two decades, while working on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Timor-Leste and Myanmar, with long periods within South Asia in particular. This means going beyond simply working within and instead immersing oneself in the (othered) field for long, extended periods of time, being fortunate enough to have become part of local academic networks and to be working in tandem with colleagues from across Pakistan, for example.

For Lina Knorr, the experiences of her field research in Indonesia made her realise that traditional political science approaches did not help her to fully understand the processes of local political engagement she was witnessing. Since then she has incorporated a decolonial-feminist approach[5] in her research and teaching to gain a more holistic understanding of global power dynamics. In her own teaching, she gives great importance to the space of self-reflection and self-learning.

In the academic environment of Linda Gerlach, the decolonial approach to research was never explicitly made a subject of discussion and is a very uncommon concept in linguistics. Although she has been employing decolonial methods in her research for the past 10 years, it was only when she joined the team of Claudia Derichs, the chair of Transregional Southeast Asian Studies, that thinking and discussing about the decolonial-feminist approach became an important part of her everyday academic life.

Finally, as an academic and associated lecturer, Nadine Heil is working on alternative approaches and has been using decolonial, indigenous and feminist lenses in research for the past three years. It was towards the end of her graduate studies when she noticed the importance of this special perspective in research and in teaching. Heil thinks of it as a process, a crucial one, to produce knowledge in more respectful, context-sensitive and people-centred ways. All of this influenced her in establishing the *Werkstatt Wissensproduktion* ("Workshop Knowledge Production"; see Signpost 1).

Within the Institute for Asian and African Studies vocal proponents call for a New Area Studies approach (albeit they are not the only ones; see interview

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4   For an excellent, current overview on the legacies and challenges of positionality and spatiality of critical knowledge productions and academic publishing in and on Asia beyond Anglo-American- and Eurocentrism see Jackson 2019.

5   According to Chilisa, a decolonial-feminist research approach is "used to refer to the process of critique, decolonization and indigenization of Euro-Western methodologies and the theorizing of methodologies that are informed by the theoretical perspectives and the worldviews of third world feminisms, African feminisms, Black feminisms, borderland-Mestizajefeminisms, and all the marginalized non-Western feminisms" (2012: 261).

with Peter Jackson in this special issue for instance) combined with a transregional perspective as crucial to knowledge productions.[6] One key proponent, Vincent Houben, argues for scholars to consider and address a number of concerns. First, to work on "alternity", i.e. producing not generalisations but rather context-sensitive, situated knowledges and mid-range theories with relevance for global-scale theories. Second, to engage in "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo 2009) vis-à-vis mainstream disciplines that predominantly and systematically ascribe non-Western areas to a secondary status,[7] i.e. as places from which to extract knowledge, used as intellectual raw materials to be processed in an asymmetrical knowledge production chain centred towards the Global North. And thus, third, to regard New Area Studies as more than just a counter-hegemonic process to Eurocentric knowledge productions and discourses thereof.[8] Along this line, Claudia Derichs identifies, among other things, the lack of reverse flows and thus a paucity of transformative, situated knowledges as key factors for (hegemonic) imbalances in knowledge productions worldwide. Transformative (thus "not only" counter-hegemonic but also non-compartmentalising) knowledge productions therefore require ontological ecologies – that is: (decentred) "plurality" (see Derichs 2017). In addition, this necessitates a more profound and vocal critique of the methodological approaches of systematic disciplines (and the preference given to quantitative methodologies) and their under-problematised situatedness.[9]

New Area Studies, be it in the realm of teaching or research, has a crucial function and role to play outside of academia, Vincent Houben stresses. Pointing towards the rise of right-wing neopopulism and xenophobia, in particular in post-2015 Europe, New Area Studies knowledge productions facilitate different, decolonial, decentred contextualisations and may inform policymakers and the wider public.[10] How New Area Studies scholars attempt to make sense

6   See for example the work of Vincent Houben and Boike Rehbein, as well as their debating section inputs, plus those of Claudia Derichs, in this special journal issue (and the responses from international colleagues).

7   Walter Mignolo (2009: 159) critiques an assumption that those from cultures positioned in the Global South are regarded as a "token" of their culture while "[s]uch expectations will not arise if the author 'comes' from Germany, France, England or the US. As we know: the first world has knowledge, the third world has culture. [...] The need for political and epistemic de-linking here comes to the fore, as well as decolonializing and decolonial knowledges [...]".

8   Another proponent, Rachel Harrison, based at SOAS in London, identifies a need for a common, interdisciplinary framework of New Area Studies which allows scholars to work on/from cultural difference and to be able "to talk to each other" across areas and disciplines. In the same vein, Peter Jackson from ANU in Canberra, Australia, reflects that the internal critique of Western epistemologies led him in his quest to explore non-Western epistemologies, to reinvent himself as a historian as well as to become inter-/cross-disciplinary toward the end of his career when working in the field of critical gender and cultural studies (notes taken by Andrea Fleschenberg during the EuroSEAS 2019 Conference, Roundtable on New Area Studies, Berlin, September 2019).

9   Notes taken by Andrea Fleschenberg during the EuroSEAS 2019 conference, Roundtable on New Area Studies, Berlin, September 2019; see also debating input by Claudia Derichs, Vincent Houben and Boike Rehbein in this special issue as well as responses from international colleagues.

10   Notes taken by Andrea Fleschenberg during the EuroSEAS 2019 conference, Roundtable on Southeast Asian Studies – Directions, Themes and Disciplines, Berlin, September 2019.

of the world needs to become a more resilient approach for critical knowledge productions, or, as Martina Padmanabahan argues, we have to look beyond the "region" (in the sense of an ascribed container) and connect grounded research with global debates and emerging issues in wider society and across societies. This includes linking knowledge communities and mobility of ideas in a transregional approach, cognisant of the fact that existing and emerging issues of our contemporary world no longer fit (if ever they did) the boxes and boundaries imposed by discipline-based, Global North-centred epistemologies, methodologies and theorising.[11] Following the idea of alternity, bridging conceptual translations, decentred encounters and knowledge exchanges is crucial within otherwise increasingly widespread, hegemonic, exclusionary, self-centred populist discourses and socio-political agenda-settings.[12] In addition, alternity, plurality and decoloniality are crucial for Area Studies as an academic field to emerge from colonial and Cold War trajectories. Subsequently New Area Studies aims to continuously challenge and reconfigure Global North-centeredness and engage with pluralistic knowledge productions on/from Asia, across and within multiple regions as well as from a variety of knowledge brokers within and outside of academia.

Exploring practices, interactions and challenges of decolonial-feminist approaches in teaching and research, we would like to sketch out below three signposts, derived from our activities along with experiences of decentred academic togetherness and exchange.

Signpost 1 – Academic teaching

The "Workshop Knowledge Production" is a student-initiated course of training and a space for self-reflection. Decolonial, indigenous and feminist research approaches represent the core of the workshop sessions. Running for the third semester, it is a collaboration between our research-based learning initiative at the Chair for Transregional Southeast Asian Studies at IAAW and the bologna.lab

11 Notes taken by Andrea Fleschenberg during the EuroSEAS 2019 Conference, Roundtable on Southeast Asian Studies – Directions, Themes and Disciplines, Berlin, September 2019.

12 Discussants of the 2019 EuroSEAS Roundtable on New Area Studies reflected also on the growing politicisation of academic life and how New Area Studies scholars should position themselves and their research, as introduced by Benjamin Baumann. Highlighting the entanglement of Area Studies with politics – as evident in the post-9/11 evolving studies on Islam, part of a wider geopolitical contestation surrounding the so-called War on Terror (see also Manan Ahmed's discussant entry in the debating section) or when confronted with rising illiberal nationalisms – roundtable participants argued that one can be an engaged, critical as well as rigorous scholar. Retreating to academia and thus distancing oneself from political entanglements of knowledges is problematic given an illiberal turn in "truth claiming in a world of fake news" and the call for transformative knowledge productions (notes taken by Andrea Fleschenberg during the EuroSEAS 2019 conference, Roundtable on New Area Studies, Berlin, September 2019).

at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.[13] The workshop developed out of a BA project seminar reflecting on "Volatility, Hegemony, Neo-Coloniality and Knowledge Production in the Global South in the Context of Gender, Displacement and Activisms", which motivated a group of students to become more familiar with decolonial perspectives in their own research.

The ideas of these students to create their own format of exchange was brought to the attention of the staff at the bologna.lab with the aim of making its interdisciplinary, student centred and research-based approach more relevant for a number of student bodies (and drawing participation also from the Freie Universität Berlin) as an interdisciplinary elective course option. Students opt for the "Workshop Knowledge Production" for a variety of reasons, primarily as a reaction against the standard course offerings, due, for example, to complaints including, among others: 1) course literature derived mainly from Global North-based (male) scholars and English-language universities and thus lacking in diversity; 2) an experienced lack of persons of colour being involved in academic teaching, as well as the inequality and lack of female and/or indigenous scholarly work being presented; 3) a lack of diverse, creative sources to draw from in research, such as the use of oral histories or art in social sciences or area studies to uncover cultural dynamics.

The core instrument of the workshop is to enable a safe and creative space for discussion and (self-)reflection on decolonial, feminist approaches and one's own positionality in knowledge production and academic practices. Students bring their own ideas, concerns and questions to each session; principal articles on decolonial discourses are contemplated and standard research methods are questioned in order to develop critical perspectives. In addition, we used the past COVID-induced semester of digital teaching to produce a different set of materials: an audio podcast series featuring interviews with fifteen scholars – at different stages of their academic biography (ranging from BA students to full professors) and from a number of different academic contexts – with a particular interest or a strong opinion on decolonial approaches. From one conversation, conducted by a student member of the workshop, the idea developed to join digital workshops on critical research epistemologies between South African students and students from Humboldt University. The podcasts provide students with valuable, diverse insights into lived practices and numerous suggestions for reflecting on one's positionality and negotiations thereof, bridging theoretical texts and the lived realities of students' research projects. Another core tool was the open structure of the workshop and its horizontal nature, crucial when reflecting upon and aiming to make sense of power structures within research, academia and within and across societies. Students

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13 More information on the BMBF-funded initiative for new modes of teaching and learning can be found, unfortunately only in German, at the website of bologna.lab, https://www.bolognalab.hu-berlin.de/de (accessed 14 September 2020).

called for even more such space to be given in their usual study courses, because they experience a paucity of spaces to reflect upon standard methodologies in academia in order to engage in alternative knowledge productions. During the workshop sessions, students came up with research-based ideas, which have not only shaped their academic work but also their perspectives on both society and research.

Teaching with a decolonial research perspective in mind creates difficulties on several levels in Global North-based academia. One main aspect of such a perspective is the development of one's positionality in research and a critical reflection thereof. This also means revealing vulnerability in front of students, by pointing towards our own blind spots and ways in which our research is entangled in Global North-centred knowledge production systems, which (possibly) engage in forms of epistemic violence (Brunner 2020, Motta 2019). Following Rosalba Icaza and Sara de Jong (2019: xv), teaching with a decolonial research perspective entails the use of critical pedagogy which "understands teachers as learners and students as co-responsible with their teachers for the creation of a communal space of learning". This partially breaks up the established hierarchy between students and teacher, while also demanding more involvement and critical engagement of students. The dismantling of hierarchies is in line with the general goal of creating space for the process of unlearning systems of colonial knowledge production (Vergès 2019: 92). In practice, this has meant for us to take the interests, abilities and backgrounds of the students into greater consideration when planning our seminars. Giving students the space to actually be involved in the preparation of the seminar has led to greater involvement in class discussions and has systematically improved the sense of a safe learning environment, which fosters greater self-reflection.

Leading students to reflect on their positionality in knowledge productions takes time and requires engagement with a variety of didactical methods, as critical self-reflection rarely develops after a 90-minute frontal monologue. Despite the great results coming from the application of diverse didactical methods, the engagement with them and the preparation of seminars in such a manner are often downgraded as "school-like" by other colleagues. The additional effort required for the seminar development further reduces the time available for other research projects or publications. Seminars that are conceptualised so as to further critical thinking and self-reflection are, nevertheless, greatly appreciated by students, leading to large enrolment numbers among students from different disciplinary backgrounds. While this can be seen as a great accomplishment for lecturers, it also puts them in the position of creating seminars that are interdisciplinary and student oriented. One way of adequately meeting the need for interdisciplinarity and offering diverse per-

spectives is co-teaching with other colleagues, ideally with researchers from different geographical areas and (inter-)disciplinary fields. More incentives are required for decolonial co-teaching initiatives, taking a cue from digital opportunities to bring together student and faculty bodies across spaces and positionalities, as some of us explored during the COVID-induced digital teaching period. Through a minimal use of resources this period allowed us to open up for students from universities based in the Global South (albeit with their own challenges given certain digital divides) as well as to produce and use audio podcast-based guest lectures and video-based guest-moderated seminar sessions along with online-learning platforms providing resource portfolios and interactive group work with students and colleagues from and based in Asia as well as Europe.

Signpost 2 – Academic research

With regards to academic research, a decolonial-feminist approach entails attempting to bridge, or rather to bypass, the insider–outsider conundrum, centre–periphery asymmetries, hegemonic discourses and practices within national as well as international academic knowledge productions. Doing so has been an intricate endeavour in many ways and on many fronts, which we can only briefly sketch out here.

On the one hand it calls for critical engagement with the practices and materials available, which more often than not (still) remain expressions and manifestations of academic knowledge production from the Global North. Many handbooks and readers on, for instance, social theories or on research methodologies are centred and subsequently often detached from the diverse ground realities, discourses, resources and agendas as well as respective challenges as experienced within academic everyday life and state of affairs in Global South countries. Quite frequently, case studies provided in such training manuals are written from perspectives of academics positioned within the Global North and focus on their positionalities and challenges when entering the field.

On the other hand, a decolonial-feminist approach involves engagement with the everyday politics of critical social sciences within a post-colonial polity. University systems mirror wider socio-political contestations and quests for control, along with a paucity of resources in addition to social, economic and cultural stratifications. One key issue is the self-censorship by academics themselves, be they students in search of a thesis project or faculty engaged in research projects or supervision, or outright censorship by academic or state authorities to maintain and establish a certain hegemonic policy on diverse

issues such as identity, minorities, security or development. Those who challenge hegemonic narratives and practices not only find themselves at risk in terms of career advancement or precarious work contracts, but subject to demotions, cancellation of work contracts, legal charges (e.g. for violating national security laws or for being blasphemous) or extra-judicial measures such as disappearances or worse. Questions of censorship and hegemonic knowledge productions within a public university system have implications for critical knowledge productions – who can be critical where and in what position? Who do we engage with as academic partners if critical social scientists might find it difficult to maintain a secure status within public academic institutions or to cooperate with research partners from abroad on no-go areas or topics?

The problem with socioeconomic stratifications among academics in a Global South community can be highlighted with the example of long-standing initiatives and networks such as the Karachi-based Collective for Social Science Research, which started in 2001 with studies drawing from triangulated methodological approaches. The majority of the Collective's members are degree holders from elite international universities or elite private national universities. They are thus part of a small network of highly qualified social science researchers working within a distinctly more open and well-resourced space, with access and linkages to international bodies of knowledge production that commission research work.[14] This does not intend, in any way, to diminish the value, importance, quality, rigour and critical knowledge-production generated by the Collective. However, we need to distinguish their realm from the circumstances of the majority of social scientists based at public universities and colleges across a country such as Pakistan who lack the positioning and visibility of the Collective's knowledge productions.

In contemplating decentred approaches to critical knowledge productions, Meghana Nayak and Eric Selbin's approach to decentring international relations could be insightful. They critique a myopic misreading of hegemonic power versus the "myriad possibilities" of thinking about the societies, public affairs and politics thereof (Nayak / Selbin 2010: 2). When following this line of critical inquiry as suggested by Nayak and Selbin as well as Suresh Canagarajah (2002), among many others to be highlighted here, and operationalising the concept of centre and periphery/peripheries for the cases at hand, a multi-level and multi-layered matrix of knowledge production (read: knowledge (as) power) manifests itself. In academic research and togetherness, we therefore need to spotlight and tackle the distinct conditions at the centre of analysis compared to those at the many "peripheries", often in conditions marked by volatility,

14 The Collective's research draws in particular from a political economy perspective as well as informal collective action and social networks on a wide range of topics such as agriculture, cities, climate change, nutrition, marginality, migration, reproductive health, resilience and social protection. Studies are based at the intersection of (inter)national academia, consultancy for (non-)governmental organisations and international development agencies (see Research Collective 2020).

disconnect and resources' scarcity, linked to experiences of multiple "borders" to engage in (inter)nationally recognised knowledge production and exposure thereof.

Such a complex matrix remains challenging in multiple and diverse contexts. As Caroline Hau argued in her reflections on "Southeast Asian Studies as Practiced in Asia" during a panel discussion at the EuroSEAS conference in 2019, those are manifold: first, hierarchies in knowledge productions are not challenged by writing in English.[15] Second, academic fields within the Global South, namely Southeast Asia, are marked by censorship and taboo topics which rely on alternate academic fields, more than often outside the region and within the Global North, for free knowledge exchange and debates (while encountering additional configurations of power and inequality, one might add).[16]

Signpost 3 – Challenges for decentred academic togetherness and exchange

This special issue was developed out of the international conference EuroSEAS 2019 hosted by our department. Student assistants at our institute were greatly involved throughout the organisation process and were vital in bringing the conference to life. Reflecting upon their experiences in organising such an international conference focusing on Southeast Asia, Merle Groß, Lara Hofner, Danny Kretschmer, Judith von Plato and Jona Pomerance wrote in our institute's newsletter that the conference portrayed "a gap between the critique of power relations within the regional studies and the implementation of this critique in academic practice" (Groß et al. 2020: 36). This is a great summary of what can repeatedly be seen in academia today.

While discourses and methods develop, academic practice is more often than not left unchanged. In seminars we preach that silent voices need to be given space but in conference preparations too often it is forgotten that there needs to be organisational backing for marginalised people to have the necessary means to participate, to engage, to be heard. Sufficient funding for scholars and knowledge brokers from the Global South without institutional financial backing or any direct institutional affiliation should be one of the first goals to

15 Given that English today constitutes the hegemonic language for the production and publication of knowledge, thus becoming visible and readable within academia is linked to issues of linguistic standardisation and literacy as well as to a distinct impoverishment of conceptualisations and expressions that rely on a plurality of languages, terminologies, their diversely conceived notions, practiced conceptualisations and connotations. See for instance, a critique of the Global North-centred term LGBTQI and vernacular language practices and activists' discourses on gender non-conforming identities in Myanmar (Chua / Gilbert 2015) and Indonesia (Ridwan / Wu 2018).

16 Notes taken by Andrea Fleschenberg during the EuroSEAS 2019 conference, Roundtable on Southeast Asian Studies – Directions, Themes and Disciplines, Berlin, September 2019.

tackle when organising conferences, especially conferences within the field of Area Studies. Unsurprisingly, leaving this topic to the last minute decreases the chances for greater funding. We managed to obtain full conference funding for eight scholars from the Global South.[17] While we were aware that this is still a small number compared to the hundreds of conference participants, it was important to us to give these scholarships primarily to feminist activist scholars, who often fall between the cracks in funding applications.

In this context, the general process of determining funding guidelines for academic associations as key organising bodies of such conferences should also be subjected to closer scrutiny. These guidelines are often developed by privileged Western scholars who base them on their perception of who is worthy of funding and counts as a valid or established – and thus "deserving" – scholar and knowledge broker to be included. In the light of academic togetherness this process should also be made more inclusive and transparent, cater to intersectional dynamics of power and inequality in the field of academia and thus further narrow the power imbalances within academia and across academic fields.

Returning to EuroSEAS 2019, we nevertheless tried to use the time and space to strengthen our academic relations. With the receivers of the scholarship provided by a German political foundation[18] we organised a focus group discussion on our common understanding of how we work on the topic of feminist critical knowledge production from different angles and how we could extend our collaborations. Note that "collaborations" is conceived not only in terms of combined research projects but also as a means of gaining a better understanding of how differently our activities and works are being affected by shrinking spaces.[19]

Another issue concerns the question of partner universities in the Global South. There are often well-organised Western-style and/or privately financed universities in the Global South with which it is easier to collaborate than with a number of public universities. Private universities usually have a better academic infrastructure, greater academic output and more funding than public universities, which usually draw from a wider and more diverse, inclusive student body. A challenge emerges that can only partly be resolved, for instance via a hub-based approach where a well-established and functioning private university serves as a vehicle for a wider cooperation with public universities. The idea behind this strategy is to be able to "produce" according to required, meas-

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17 Apart from this our colleague Rosa Cordillera A. Castillo additionally succeeded in including an even larger number of scholars from the Philippines as part of her drive for Philippines Studies at the IAAW.

18 Stipends were granted by the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, which is aligned with the German Green Party and works within a number of Asian countries from which we could thus invite activist scholars.

19 In this context, "shrinking spaces" refers to processes in which civil society and researchers are put under pressure by governments and state authorities. Their work is being restricted, threatened, or targeted with defamation, thereby limiting their possibilities, e.g. shrinking the spaces in which they can operate.

ured and peer-reviewed academic outputs and hence to perform within a set academic standards and performance indicators which are part of further third-party funding success.

Engaging in capacity-building activities with public universities can also lead to a reconfigured (neo-)colonial, Global North-centred approach to academic togetherness apart from being subjected to a projectification of academic knowledge productions and exchange that often does not allow for sustainable network and infrastructure development. This might be due to the resources made available by funding institutions and the specific time limitations of funded projects in combination with divergent agenda-settings and interests by academic partners involved. From our experiences with several grant proposals with a variety of funding organisations one of the greatest challenges we face is the inequality of available financial resources and academic infrastructure between the Global North and the Global South. In almost all cases the main applicants as well as the financial backing are from the Global North. Although the researchers from the Global North and the Global South engage in a horizontal academic relationship, partners from the Global South are often forced into a position of dependence due to a restricted access to financial resources. One possible solution is to budget financial means for the provision of fellowships for colleagues and PhD students from the Global South. These should be granted in addition to the continuing offer of academic supervision of PhD students in cooperation with our colleagues from the Global South. In consideration of the points just mentioned there is still one aspect that cannot be changed or accounted for: in most cases, the project lead and the majority of Principal Investigators will be from the Global North. Researchers from the Global South very rarely have the possibility to apply for funding independently. In other words, they are highly dependent on personal academic connections to researchers from the Global North in order to acquire finances for their research approaches and projects.

Another aspect that is important when applying for and carrying out projects with colleagues from the Global South and employing a decolonial, decentred approach is to provide space for different academic styles and approaches to academic writing and research methods that might not conform with Global North-centred academic standards. We need to open up more avenues for acknowledging different writing styles and methodologies used to transport knowledge and information.

Finally, there are also conceptual challenges that we face. Each call for project proposals comes with certain conditions and definitions that need to be considered, accepted and met by the applicants. What does it mean for a project if the funding is provided by an organisation or institution that defines countries from the Global South as countries that occupy a marginalised position in the global science production? Furthermore, many calls are strict about where

the financial means can be spent, often excluding institutions based in the Global South from directly receiving any of the funding or managing it themselves. How do we engage with these limitations and definitions when we apply for funding for our projects even if some of these regulations are opposed to our quest for decolonial, decentred and critical knowledge productions together with our partners from the Global South? To what extent is it possible and effective to openly criticise such formulations in the calls of funding agencies, e.g. during information sessions? What are other avenues?

Instead of conclusions

Bearing in mind the concept of academic togetherness and our experiences as touched on in the signposts above, we have to revisit our responsibilities towards our academic partners from the Global South. One issue is our responsibility towards so-called "scholars at risk" when engaging with questions of power and risk. This also influences who becomes part of critical knowledge productions (and is in a position to do so, for instance in international publications). While there exist a number of programmes for scholars at risk, some of these scholars might not meet certain performance indicators of major calls for international fellowship programmes. Furthermore, they might face reprisals within their academic institutions such as not being promoted or having to leave established academic institutions and then not qualifying for grant applications in the Global North, or not being recognised as academic scholars or knowledge brokers.

While we struggle to find solutions in order to decolonialise our academic lives, our theories and our practices, there are many questions that remain. How do we ensure more inclusivity beyond limited grants and programmes such as the scholar-at-risk programmes, more openness to alternative positions for knowledge productions that inform academic teaching and research? How can we cater for inclusiveness in terms of voices, languages and methodological ways of (re)presenting knowledges? How do we counter our own hegemonic academic practices and self-censorship in order to continue to be eligible ourselves for (research) visas necessary to further our own academic merits? How important is academic solidarity, how risky is it, and for whom? How can this be conceptualised and resourced in our own academic practices? Who has whose back?

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