5 Inclusion and Exclusion of Postcolonial Subjects in Knowledge Production

Academic Experience in Sweden, Cameroon, and Germany

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The hegemony of Western thought and practices in academia have been subjected to extensive critique from postcolonial and anti-colonial theorists for its reinforcing of neo-colonial relationships and structural inequalities (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1990). This debate on the hegemony of Western epistemology reflects the historical struggle for recognition and equality of postcolonial subjects— including indigenous people and ethnic/racialized minorities and suggests that knowledge production is deeply implicated in power struggles. In connection to this, Linda Smith notes that research is "a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other" (Smith, 1999, p. 2). Although it is more than a century to the collapse of empires, and half a century after the independence of many former European colonies, science and the production of knowledge still privileges a Eurocentric worldview that is at odds with the knowledge of ethnic/racialized minorities and former colonized peoples. Nowhere is this more visible than in the growing disconnect between the ideals of neoliberal economic development and indigenous livelihood and lifestyle objectives, as indicated in the following quotation.

> I am a Waorani woman, a mother, and a leader of my people. The Amazon rainforest is my home. I am writing you this letter because the fires are raging still. Because the corporations are spilling oil in our rivers [...] Because our elders are dying from coronavirus, while you are planning your next moves to cut up our lands to stimulate an economy that has never benefited us. Because, as Indigenous peoples, we are fighting to protect what we love – our way of life, our rivers, the animals, our forests, life on Earth – and it's time that you listened to us.
>
> Nenquimo (2020, para. 2)

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Universities have long played a central role in knowledge production, which is why it is also the focus of attention here. The aim in this chapter is to examine the exclusion and inclusion of ethnic/racialized minorities in knowledge production, highlighting some of the individual efforts and good practices that are taken as a response to it. This analysis draws on my own experiences in Sweden as a doctoral student (2005–2011), in Cameroon as a university lecturer (2016–2019), and in Germany as a Research Fellow (2019–present day), fuelled by discussions with other African migrant scholars at the universities where I have worked. Conceptually informed by Bhabha's (1994) notion of third space, this chapter is organized in the following manner: the introduction followed by a literature review on diversity in European universities, and a brief discussion of the theoretical and methodological framework that informs the study. The final sections are devoted to empirical analysis and concluding remarks.

Diversity in European Universities

Traditionally under-represented groups in academia: the poor, women, and ethnic/racialized minorities, have gained more access to universities in recent times. In Germany and the UK, for example, there is a higher representation of some ethnic minority groups than Whites in undergraduate study programmes (Kristen, Reimer, & Kogan, 2008; Wakeling, 2009). On the other hand, at the level of university staff (researchers, lecturers, and administrators) there is an under-representation of ethnic/racialized minorities (Bhopal & Jackson, 2013; Claeys-Kulik, Jørgensen & Stöber, 2019; Essed, 1999); and the majority of minority staff who are employed, are employed in temporary positions— doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers, or in junior faculty positions. This development has been attributed to established practices that unwittingly exclude or marginalize minorities (*ibid*.; Bhopal & Jackson, 2013; Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998). Most if not all universities today showcase a commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion through inclusive policies that are clearly stated in their mission values and goals. A political commitment to support diversity and inclusiveness in higher education are commonly encountered (see Claeys-Kulik, Jørgensen & Stöber, 2019). A study conducted by Claeys-Kulik, Jørgensen and Stöber (2019), based on a survey of 159 higher education institutions across Europe, followed-up by semi-structured interviews between the autumn of 2018 and summer of 2019, noted that the prioritization of equity, diversity and inclusion by university leadership is far from echoed at the faculty or departmental level, largely because of the lack of awareness of this policy and training programmes to bring about such an awareness. Additionally, the study indicates a lack of consensus on the various dimensions of diversity that deserve recognition. The authors explained that in those societies where ethnic diversity or LGBT + rights are considered divisive topics; it is difficult to gain

consensus about including these divisive dimensions of diversity within institutional policies. In contrast, societies where there is more tolerance for multiple dimensions of diversity, individuals tend to support only one specific dimension. The reason for this is that in cases where one of the dimensions—gender, for example may have a long history, there might be a fear of diluting the gains already achieved for this dimension by adding other dimensions. This problem is reflected in many German universities where until recently the term equality (*Gleichberechtigung* or *Gleichstellung*) was mostly associated with gender (*ibid.*).

Theory and Method

My analysis in this chapter draws on Bhabha's (1994) concepts of hybridity and third space. Hybridity refers to the mixing of cultures, the concept of third space concerns itself with addressing the space, developed between two poles or binaries — self /other, colonizers/colonized, and so on (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha explains that the notion of hybridity derives from the idea of translation, understood as "a double process of decontextualization and recontextualization, first reaching out to appropriate something alien and then domesticating it" (Burke & Hsia, 2007, p. 10). Cultural translation therefore opens up the possibility for something new, while in the same process it "denies the essentialism of a prior given original or originary culture" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211). This optimistic assessment of hybridity has been linked to the Latin American concept of *mestizaje* which, like hybridity, celebrates processes of mixture (Wade, 2004). The concepts of third space, hybridity, and *mestizaje* have been celebrated as the antidote to essentialist ideas of "race" and culture (Fernández, 1992; Ghasemi, Sasani & Nemati, 2018). But not everyone is convinced by this argument. In a review of Bhabha's work, he was challenged by arguments that alleged his hybridization concept to fall into its own trap by failing to deconstruct essentialist subjectivities; instead, producing essentialist poles. "Does not hybridization assume [...] the existence of hitherto undifferentiated cultures or knowledges, which is the problem that Bhabha initially sought to counter?" (Howell, 1996, p. 116). A similar critique has been levied against *mestizaje* (Wade, 2004). Moreover, Bhabha has been criticized for assuming that the third space consisted of symmetrical relations (Zhou & Pilcher, 2019). In their study on language and intercultural studies, Zhou and Pilcher note that what seems to elude the third space discourse is a discussion of what this space really is, and what the meaning of third, entails. Instead, Zhou and Pilcher conceptualize the third space as a "moment of intervention" that addresses power structures: "Our contention centres on power struggle, which we believe is an inescapable and often uncomfortable facet of individuals' intercultural communication experiences even in the microcosm of a (institutionalised) learning context"

(Zhou & Pilcher, 2019, p. 5). This argument is aligned with what Michael Wolf described as the "postcolonial translation practice that emphasizes interventionist strategies, and that seeks to transcend dichotomizing notions of translation" (Wolf, 2000, p. 130). Wolf too, considers reflective ethnography to be central to postcolonial translation projects that are deployed as the practices of intervention. A reflective ethnography, as he explains, calls for an ethnographic writing that is open to a plurality of voices that allows for a collective construction of knowledge.

In light of the discussion above, my analysis in this chapter draws on the third space as a moment of intervention that is critical, participatory, and emancipatory. This allows for an intervention in the process of knowledge production at both individual and intercultural levels. This is demonstrated by Adrian Holliday's view in an interview that notes: "So the third space is a place that I go to in order to interrogate that [hierarchical structure of power]" (*emphasis added*) (Zhou & Pilcher, 2019, p. 3). In a further example, Zhou and Pilcher state, "So if you do your research properly and follow all the research disciplines of trying to separate yourself from the beliefs, then you are trying to acquire a third space" (*ibid*., p. 3). The intercultural level on the other hand, builds an intervention strategy that involves interrogating hierarchical structures and dominant discourses that others and silences postcolonial subjects and ethnic minorities. The challenge here, as noted by Zhou and Pilcher, is that power struggle remains an inescapable and often uncomfortable facet of individual experiences within intercultural dialogue. The opening/closure of intercultural dialogue is intricately linked to the extent to which those involved remain willing to "descend" into the instabilities typical of the third space. Furthermore, intercultural dialogue can also occur without the participants crossing boundaries that produce otherness, leaving them in the essentialist and polar end of the third space. On the other hand, those in intercultural dialogue can "go beyond the idea of 'this' and 'that' and dissolve the boundaries" (Zhou & Pilcher, 2019, pp. 3–5), bringing them to the non-essentialist version of third space (*see also* Holliday and Amadasi, 2020). In terms of method, my analysis draws on autoethnography to investigate the experience of ethnic/racialized minorities in the domain of knowledge production, allowing me to reflect on my own experiences on campuses in Europe and Africa, to reach a better understanding of the subjectivities and experiences of ethnic minorities in the field of knowledge production (*see* Khosravi, 2007).

Academic Experiences in Cameroon and Sweden

I begin my autoethnography about academic experiences of university life in Cameroon, with the following quote:

> Although Africa boasts a tradition of indigenous and Islamic higher education institutions that predate Western colonization, the roots of

> nearly all of the modern higher education institutions in Africa can be traced to the colonial period. From the start, modern higher education institutions in Africa were developed with external support, initially from religious entities and philanthropic organizations and later from colonial government.
>
> Samoff and Carrol (2004, p. 74)

Research in Cameroon, like in other parts of Africa, is underfunded and the meagre funds available mostly accrue from foreign sponsors from the Global North. Available data indicates that African countries collectively, in the south of the Sahara only spend 0.3% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on Research and Development (R&D), which is significantly lower than the 2% average expenditure in North America and Western Europe (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015). While the UNESCO data indicates that South Africa's expenditure of 0.83% of GDP on R&D is the highest in Africa, it lags behind countries in the Global North. Sweden, for example, spends 3.34% of domestic output on R&D (*ibid*.).

Low spending on research in African countries leaves them dependent on external sponsors who use their leverage to shape the nature and focus of research in Africa (Samoff & Carrol, 2004). The share of foreign funding on research in Cameroon stood at 39% in the early 1990s and much of this funding came from Europe and North America (Gaillard, Zink & Tullberg, 2003). A review of all approved proposals in the field of biomedical research projects, from 1997 through 2012, at the National Ethics Committee of Cameroon indicated that research funders had a significant influence on the type of research conducted (Walter et al., 2017). The review also showed that the interest and focus of internationally sponsored research were different from locally sponsored research projects that prioritized the health priorities of Cameroonians, a focus international sponsors only partially aligned with. These findings echo with the view that foreign assistance to research and higher education in Africa are driven by the nationalist interests of donor countries:

> The rhetoric of aid has always focused on assisting African countries to develop their own higher education systems. In practice, of course, most of the aid-providing organizations explicitly and implicitly have been guided by and seek to promote national interest.
>
> Samoff and Carrol (2004, p. 86)

While external support for research in Cameroon has contributed to the establishment of public research institutes, their focus primarily centres around applied research, particularly in the field of agro-industrial production (Gaillard, Zink & Tullberg, 2003).

During the time I worked in Cameroon, at the university of Bamenda, students were encouraged to conduct research on topics that addressed

local problems, in other words, they conducted research to contribute to development of the country. At the same time, my colleagues also showed a preference for applied research that addressed the practical problems of Cameroon or those affecting the local contexts of research. This sentiment was echoed by several senior civil servants, working in various ministries in Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon. I visited some of these ministries in Yaounde, accompanied by BA and MA students from Cameroon and Germany in 2018, to interview officials for a project on youth perspectives on making a future. While some of the state officials wanted to know how our project was relevant to the national interest of Cameroon before they committed to participating in the study, they and even some of my colleagues in Cameroon showed less appreciation for research that had no direct relevance to local challenges. They expressed scepticism about basic research, especially linked to foreign institutions, and such scepticism was not without merit, given that foreign powers used such research to promote their own interest in Cameroon and Africa (Walter et al., 2017; Gaillard, Zink & Tullberg, 2003; Samoff & Carrol, 2004). However, the push towards applied research appears to come with a price tag — conducted at the cost of basic research, without which Cameroon and Africa would be in a disadvantageous position in terms of knowledge production, especially that which served local needs. In Cameroon, knowledge production continues to be influenced by the North. First, as major research grant providers and second, for their preference of applied research over basic research. This works against the development of indigenous knowledge in Cameroon because both applied and basic forms of research must necessarily complement one another, if they want to produce alternative knowledge prefigured to local realities in Cameroon that at the same time, also empower the country and community.

My experiences in Sweden were altogether different. I was impressed by the civility of Swedish society as I began my master studies. It took me some time to become accustomed to addressing professors by their first names. This norm in Sweden, a professor explained in class, diminished the hierarchy between lecturers and students and its logic made sense to me, though it was in contrast to the world I was raised in (In Cameroon and other African countries, it is impolite to address a senior in rank, age, or status by their first names). By the end of my masters studies, I was convinced that university life in Sweden and the Swedish society in general was most inclusive, finding reflection in the country's generous universal welfare policies. PhD studies in Sweden were generally well funded and study programmes were free for students, irrespective of their nationality. Students only had to pay their living costs that was usually not a problem, as Swedish universities only accepted PhD students if funds were already available. In most cases PhD students received a *doktorandtjänst* (doctoral studentship), that entitled and provided them

salary and other benefits enjoyed by state employees. In my case, I was employed at the post of a *doktorandtjänst*. However, despite the support and policies that promoted equality and inclusiveness, ethnic and racial minorities were underrepresented in the university's faculty and professional staff. Ethnic minority staff on campus were conspicuously rare, while staff of African background were even fewer. People who were visibly African on campus, were mostly cleaners or servers, then academics or administrators. The almost-complete under-representation of people of African origin, a formerly colonized people, in the upper echelon of Swedish universities systematically undermined their contribution to academic debates in Sweden and knowledge production on topics that closely affected their lives in particular, topics that were of global relevance. This is especially problematic, given the large ethnic/racialized minority population of the country today. Although I do not discount the scholarship of ethnic European scholars on topics affecting minorities, our different positionalities contribute to a larger and intersectional understanding of complex social problems, through collaborative knowledge co-created by scholars from different backgrounds and ranks.

While making academic presentations on African migrants in Sweden (Ngeh, 2011), I was challenged oftentimes by my audience — academics and non-academics alike, who argued that Sweden did not have the problem of racism, citing the country's progressive policies addressing ethnic/racialized minorities. In such encounters it became clear to me that the topic of racism was an uncomfortable one for the Swedes, perhaps more so in the context of a discussion that openly took place between a Black researcher and a White audience. The disagreement with critics on the topic of racism during research presentations is welcome in an academic debate and is important for knowledge production. What appears to be more problematic is an attempt that avoids public debate on sensitive topics that makes members of the dominant group feel uncomfortable and fragile. Several studies indicate that racism in Sweden is often seen as "an inflammatory discourse that risks damaging the positive image of Swedish national identity" (Eliassi, 2017, p. 19; *see also* Pred, 2000), and viewing racism as inflammatory makes it a sensitive and even a taboo topic. Even though tension in the context of intercultural contacts is common in all societies, it is also not unusual for topics rooted in group differences, that are discussed to engender and increase inter-group sensitivity. This issue of sensitivity also arising in intercultural dialogue, is inherent to the third space. It is for this reason that the third space has been described as "discordant and uncomfortable places in which all of us must struggle to achieve interculturality" (Holliday & Amadasi, 2020, p. *i*). Unfortunately, while the need for cultural sensitivity is understandable, Holliday and Amadasi argue that it can be a barrier to transcending cultural boundaries during dialogue.

Transcending Binaries in Intercultural Encounters

In this final section of the analysis, I examine my experience at the University of Cologne (UoC) beginning with a collaboration in 2018. In the summer of 2018, I participated in a six-week collaborative, training programme on the subject "Urban youths' perspectives on making a future in Cameroon and/or abroad" organised by Michaela Pelican (UoC) and Deli Teri Tize (University of Yaoundé1, Cameroon), funded by the UoC. While the goals of the programme aimed at capturing some of the policy changes in Cameroon in the past decade to understand their impact on Cameroonian youth and their perspective of the future, the study also tried to understand current role models and notions of success among urban youth in Cameroon and its impact on return migrants and migrant remittances in Cameroon. The programme brought together six students from the University of Cologne and two students from the University of Bamenda, University of Dschang, and University of Yaounde one each. I participated in the programme as an academic supervisor guiding the research projects of student participants, with the two project organizers and their two colleagues from the University of Dschang and University of Yaoundé1 also participating as academic supervisors. Both Cameroonian and German students brainstormed before the official start of the project, so as to gradually develop ideas for joint research to be carried out in pairs. Preparatory seminars were organized at the home universities of students and readings (selected by the five project supervisors) were used as training material. Students were required to summarize select readings and to share these with all the other participants. The programme was kick started with an intensive five-day seminar in the summer of 2018 in Yaoundé, with the goals: German and Cameroonian student participants had to come to know one another and further develop their joint research projects; engage with the programme's thematic and theoretical framework to advance discussions on an intercultural scale; to elaborate on their research methodology, and to finalize organizational arrangements for practical fieldwork. This seminar was followed by four weeks of fieldwork, during which the students working in German-Cameroonian research tandem partnerships were sometimes accompanied by supervisors. After the fieldwork, the data collected was analysed in a five-day workshop that discussed findings and prepared a joint research report. The programme covered all research expenses, and the students received the same allowances, a decision that aimed at ensuring that all students had equal available resources. This collaborative training programme could be viewed as an example of a "moment of intervention" that addresses power structure within intercultural encounters (Zhou & Pilcher, 2019). It stands out as unique, in contrast to conventional approaches in typical North-South research collaborations that fail to acknowledge asymmetrical power

relations or address them. In a typical North-South research collaboration or partnership the dominant position of Northern researchers is often reproduced through research designs, a feature that continues throughout the research process (Bradley, 2008). As research collaborators in the South are allowed little or no input in the conception and design of collaborative research projects, this leaves them with very limited influence over the research agenda, relegated as they are, in subservient roles and responsibilities, divested from the empowered position of being data collectors, analysers, or writers.

Overcoming unequal power relations in the subject field of intercultural research is necessary for creating a third space which enables other positions to emerge. This can only be possible through collaborative efforts that embrace different perspectives and epistemologies. Also, such efforts include not turning away from and avoiding discomfort that is inherent within critical intercultural encounters. Turning away from the uneasiness of intercultural encounters further traps us in what Zhou and Pilcher (2019) describe as the essentialist frame of the third space. Although the collaborative training programme in Cameroon was largely decided on by programme organizers and colleagues at the UoC, it actively promoted equal partnership, aligning with major objective of the Global South Studies Center (GSSC) of the UoC—providing an interdisciplinary platform that discusses alternative (Southern) epistemologies, Global South issues, and critical discourses on diversification. I began working at the GSSC from the summer of 2019, conducting research on human trafficking in the context of migration from Africa to the Arab Gulf States, while also teaching master's-level courses in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology. I co-taught courses on racialization and high-risk migration last year. While the subject of racism is equally, emotionally charged, and sensitive in Germany, producing the usual discomfort, many of my students have also welcomed the opportunity of discussing issues surrounding race and racism. Some of them have expressed frustration at not being able to openly discuss the topic in public. In my conversations about racism with German colleagues, they acknowledge the sensitivity of the subject in Germany, agreeing that most people avoid discussing racial difference in public. However, as one of my German colleagues explained, that while the younger generation in Germany is critical about their "dark past," nationalist sentiments are also weaker among them, as they find no pride in the German history of the Holocaust. This "weaker nationalism" went a long way in explaining why German students were more open to discussing racism in university, finding no opportunity to discuss the subject in public where it is avoided. All in all, my experience at the GSSC is that there is an openness to diverse and alternative perspectives on various subjects. An example of this is the new working group "Decolonizing Academia," launched in November 2020 by colleagues from different departments and centres, in close association with the GSSC, with the aim

to strengthen decolonizing perspectives and to incorporate them into university teaching at the UoC. Openness in intercultural encounters where there are no hierarchies, enable the transcendence of cultural boundaries that keeps us in the non-essentialist frame of a third space, which according to Holliday and Amadasi (2020) resonates with Bhabha's original intention underlying his thesis about hybridity.

Concluding Remark

Drawing on Bhabha's (1994) concept of the third space, this chapter identifies two practices in the process of knowledge production and dissemination, both with very different outcomes. In faculties where there are no concrete measures to address the historical exclusion of ethnic/racialized minorities, the participation of these minorities in knowledge production is negatively affected by a hierarchy that privileges the dominant European perspective. Cross cultural collaboration in this context is constrained by the fear of White fragility and the consequent fear of offending someone. This outcome fails to challenge barriers that construct binaries between "Us" and "Them," thereby maintaining the status quo. On the other hand, in faculties that have concrete measures to address the historical exclusion of ethnic/racialized minorities, their existing hierarchies are interrogated, with participants willing to challenge the essentialist construction between "Us" and "Them," and thereby willing to break down barriers and status quo. The example of the collaborative training project in Cameroon is close to this learning, demonstrating that challenging barriers that construct difference in intercultural encounters depends on the deliberate efforts to break barriers made by individuals with the support of institutions. Without the support of an institution, interested in alternative epistemologies from the Global South, it would be difficult to envision or garner any support for a project that emphasises partnership with colleagues in the Global South on an equal footing. Although my learnings in this chapter are largely based on personal experiences that cannot be generalized, it provides us with an in-depth understanding of the exclusion/inclusion of postcolonial subjects within the domain of knowledge production. The difference in my experience about knowledge production in Sweden and in Germany is also largely to do with my immersion within a research network in Germany that receives institutional support for intercultural research collaborations in contrast to Sweden.

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