Towards Parity in Knowledge Production within the Framework of North-South Collaboration

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Introduction

A critical aspect in the struggle for recognition and inclusion of colonised and formerly colonised peoples – including indigenous peoples and ethnic/racialised minorities – relates to questions of representation. In particular, we pay attention to the question of how they are represented or silenced in historical accounts and excluded from knowledge production and dissemination, even when such knowledge directly relates to them. In view of this debate, the hegemony of Euro-North American-centric thought and viewpoints has been subjected to extensive critique from anti-, post- and decolonial theorists for its reinforcement of neo-colonial relationships and structural inequalities (Bhabha 2004; Fanon 1990; Mbembe 2016; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986; Said 1979; Smith 1999).

We see the debate on the decolonisation of higher education today as a reflection of the historical struggle for recognition and inclusion of colonised and formerly colonised peoples. Furthermore, we view knowledge production as being deeply implicated in power struggles and agree with Linda Smith's assertion that research is a significant site of struggle between competing interests (Smith 1999).

Academic research enjoys a near monopoly in knowledge production, which is why the way that we conduct research is also the focus of the analysis offered here. Universities and funding organisations play a central role in knowledge production by providing the resources, infrastructure and manpower among other key requirements. Consequently, the critique of Euro-North American centric epistemology and its hegemony applies to the established process of research and the institutions that reproduce it. Therefore,

it is important to consider both the process and the institutional context in analyses of knowledge production.

Our aim is to explore a collaborative approach to knowledge production and dissemination that fosters inclusion and parity by embracing a diversity of experiences and perspectives in the research process. Furthermore, we aim to interrogate existing hierarchies and subjectivities that may perpetuate the marginalisation and othering of historically marginalised peoples. Specifically, we focus on collaboration within a research team comprising academic staff at various stages of their careers and students, both undergraduates and graduates, from four universities, three of which are in Cameroon (Bamenda, Dschang, Yaoundé 1) and the fourth in Germany (Cologne). We view the project partners based in Cameroon as occupying the dual position of outsiders and insiders in the research process since they are both researchers and members of a formerly colonised society (Cameroon). By including Cameroonian and German researchers on par, we allow for perspectives grounded in the South and the North to shape the research process and outcome. However, decolonial critics call for recognising knowledge production that occurs outside of academia: in our case this would have required the inclusion of members of the society under study beyond the collaboration partners in Cameroon. While we agree with this argument, it is beyond the scope of the project we discuss here.

Our research is guided by the notion that knowledge production is a "collaborative process" involving various actors who are positioned differently. In order to minimise asymmetrical power relations and the exclusion that can arise from it, we draw on a "collaborative process": "researching with and for people rather than on people" (Mitlin and Thompson 1995: 238). This approach, known as the participatory methodological approach, calls for collaboration, recognition and inclusion in the entire research process. We explore this approach in a research project that brought together colleagues and students from universities in Cameroon and Germany in the summer of 2018 to work together in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Conceptually, we draw on Homi K. Bhabha's (2004) concepts of hybridity and Third Space. The chapter is organised in the following manner: The introduction is followed by a discussion on research collaboration in the asymmetrical North-South partnership, and the outline of our conceptual framework. The ensuing sections are devoted to empirical analysis and concluding remarks.

Power asymmetry and partnership in knowledge production

A critique of the hegemony of Euro-North American centric epistemology from decolonial and postcolonial perspectives is that it is rooted in an epistemology that excludes the very people who are the target of scientific inquiry: "the exclusion of the people talked about, from the discussion about them" (Hountondji 2005: 531). Additional criticism arising from a post-structuralist perspective holds that the hegemony of a Euro-North American centric epistemology is rooted in asymmetrical power relations that silence or dismiss the worldviews of colonised and formerly colonised peoples as well as other minorities (Hall 1992).

A common thread in the decolonising and postcolonial approaches to tackling the above problem is the call to place colonised and formerly colonised peoples and their own experiences and thoughts at the centre of knowledge production. Thus, from the position of Maori indigenous people, as explained by Smith (1999), decolonisation is initially about centring the concerns and world views of the Maori and then coming to know and understand theory and research from the Maori perspective and utilising these for Maori purposes. Likewise, drawing from African experience, decolonisation is about a liberating perspective that allows Africans to understand themselves clearly in relation both to one another and to other people in the world (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986). Central to the arguments provided by these authors is the desire for formerly colonised and indigenous people to champion the research about their community and people (de Sousa Santos 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Nyamnjoh 2012). That said, proponents of the decolonisation perspective warn that decolonisation is not the complete rejection of Western knowledge, but rather it is (among other things) about the critical examination of the Western hegemonic methodologies and perspectives, and evaluation of their relevance before any application (Hountondji 2005; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986).

The call for colonised and formerly colonised peoples to champion research about themselves and their communities, and to place their experiences and worldviews at the centre of knowledge production is undoubtedly crucial in any attempt to counter the Western hegemony of knowledge. In practice, we believe that this goal cannot be easily achieved by minority scholars or scholars from the South alone precisely because knowledge production is intertwined with global economic and political structures of inequalities that perpetuate colonial power relations and intersect with local power asymmetries. Moreover, knowledge production is costly and research in the Global South

is severely underfunded and over-reliant on external donors in the Global North who impose their own standards of accountability, responsibility and measures of success. The implication of this, as indicated in the situation of Cameroon (Ngeh 2021; Walter et al. 2017) and other African countries (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2015), is that donors use their leverage to shape the nature and focus of research on the African continent.

In anthropology, the problem of excluding the researched from the key processes of the research on them was first addressed through the adoption of reflexivity during anthropological research undertaken during the 1940s. Reflexivity entails a form of ethnographic writing that goes beyond simply reporting information provided by the subject of inquiry and instead includes the social discourse of the people under study (Wolf 2000). It allows for the incorporation of the perspective of those under study into the knowledge produced about them. In the 1970/80s, anthropology experienced a new reflexive turn which questioned the objectivity of anthropological research and called for the critical interrogation of the researcher's subjectivity and positionality in relation to the people under study. While the reflexive turn did not go unchallenged, it has opened the way for a more critical and engaged anthropology that pays attention to intersubjectivity and the co-production of knowledge (e.g., Davies 1998; Scholte 1974). In later years reflexivity was criticised for insufficiently addressing the power dynamics that privilege the dominant epistemology and critics called for a collaborative and symmetrical approach that would allow the researched to be involved as much as possible throughout the entire research process (Aijazi et al. 2021; Gay Y Blasco and De La Cruz Hernández 2012; Martin and Dandekar 2022). Notwithstanding, Aijazi and colleagues (2021) note that while the motivation for instituting collaborative research arrangements might be driven by concerns for parity, it can be sometimes "rooted in a calculus intended to render ethnographic research more convenient and conducive to the changing expectations and roles of scholars in Western universities" (ibid.: 75). In this regard, collaborative research primarily serves the interests of the university and faculty hosting the research project, and not necessarily research partners or research communities. It reinforces existing hierarchies and unequal power sharing within research teams. Furthermore, we realise that the discourse of research collaboration is riddled with contradiction. The call for collaboration in academia is at odds with the systematic devaluation of the outputs from such research. In the social sciences and humanities, co-authored publications, as noted by Aijazi et al. (2021), are often ranked below single-authored articles for merit, tenure and promotion pur-

poses. We view this contradiction as an example of institutionalised practices that normalise established hierarchies and neo-colonial practices of exclusion in research.

The work of Blasco and Hernández (2012) stands out as an excellent example of symmetrical collaborative partnership. It is a co-authored publication by a researcher and research subject, which includes both perspectives on the research process. We draw on the work of Aijazi et al. (2021) on collaboration which recognises power asymmetry and tension in the research partnership as unavoidable problems that must be confronted. Following Blasco and Hernández (2012) and Aijazi et al. (2021) we argue for a collaborative and inclusive approach that interrogates power asymmetry; contests the practices that maintain dominant cultural ideologies; challenges the North/South, Us/Them, coloniser/colonised etc. dichotomies; challenges the hegemony of the worldview of the dominant group. Our approach to collaborative research is further informed by the notion of hybridity and Third Space (Bhabha 2004) in postcolonial studies, topics which we outline in the next section.

Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space and hybridity

"Hybridity" refers to the mixing of cultures, while the concept of Third Space concerns itself with addressing the space, developed between two poles or binarities — self /other, colonisers/colonised etc. (Bhabha 2004). 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 and Hsia 2007: 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: 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 (Fernandez 1992; Ghasemi et al. 2018).

However, both the concepts of hybridity and *mestizaje* have been criticised for assuming the existence of hitherto undifferentiated cultures or knowledges, which is the problem that the authors of these concepts initially sought to counter (Howell1996; Wade 2004). Bhabha has been criticised by Zhou and

Pilcher (2019) for assuming that the Third Space consisted of symmetrical relations. Zhou and Pilcher (2019) note that what seems to elude the Third Space discourse is a discussion of what this space really is, and what the meaning of the word "third" actually entails. Instead, Zhou and Pilcher (2019) conceptualise the Third Space as a "moment of intervention" that addresses power structures (ibid.: 5). This argument is echoed by Wolf (2000) who also considers reflexive ethnography to be relevant to practices of intervention in the Third Space. A reflexive 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, our analysis 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. The individual level refers to a moment of critical reflection that allows us to interrogate assumptions about cultural differences of self and others. And the intercultural level builds on an intervention strategy that involves interrogating hierarchical structures and dominant discourses that "otherwise" and silence postcolonial subjects, ethnic minorities and the oppressed (Aijazi et al. 2021; Martin and Dandekar 2022; Zhou and Pilcher 2019). The challenge here, as noted by these authors, 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 engaged in intercultural dialogue can transcend and dissolve essentialist boundaries, bringing them to the non-essentialist version of Third Space (Holliday and Amadasi 2019; Zhou and Pilcher 2019). In terms of method, our analysis draws on critical self-reflection to investigate different experiences in a diverse research team, allowing us to reflect on our own experiences in the project (Khosravi 2007), and to demonstrate the effectiveness of parity in research in the context of North-South collaboration.

Collaboration in knowledge production in a North-South research partnership

The project "Urban youths' perspectives on making a future in Cameroon and/or abroad" was realised in the summer of 2018. For six weeks, twelve students and five supervisors from Cameroon and Cologne conducted fieldwork in the capital city of Yaoundé on the subject of future making under conditions of uncertainty. The students and supervisors formed German-Cameroonian research tandems and tackled the subject from different angles.[1] The projects focused on the strategies of young artists and journalists; the experiences of female university graduates in the labour market; the gendered trajectories of educated women and men of the Mbororo ethnic minority; the challenges faced by un/successful return migrants; and the contributions to youth development by migrant investors and home town associations. The results of our joint research will be published in a forthcoming thematic issue on "Urban Youth and Future Making in Cameroon".

The project grew out of an initial partnership in 2007 between Michaela Pelican and colleagues of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Yaoundé 1, as well as long familiarity and partnership between Jonathan Ngeh and Michaela Pelican dating back to the early 2000s when Jonathan was still an undergraduate student in Sociology and Anthropology at University of Buea and Michaela a PhD student conducting her fieldwork in Cameroon. In 2017, Deli Teri Tize (University of Yaoundé 1) and Michaela Pelican (University of Cologne) developed the idea of a collaborative research project involving students from the two partner universities to conduct research in two sites: the capital Yaoundé in the francophone Centre region and the city of Bamenda in the Anglophone North West. However, due to the political crisis in the Anglophone North West and South West regions, which started in 2016 and took a violent turn in October 2017 (Pelican 2022), conducting fieldwork in Bamenda was no longer feasible. In response, Deli and Michaela decided to limit the

1 The institutions involved were the Universities of Bamenda (UoB), Cologne (UoC), Dschang (UoD) and Yaoundé 1 (UoY1). The students who participated were Nzouenkeu Guylaine and Chancelyne Wulseh Yein (UoB), Dana Harms, Johanna Merz, Eugene Tingwey, Lotta Schütt, Brice Stapelfeldt and Anna Woelki (UoC), Isa Adamu and Hamza Dabo (UoD), and Awah Kum Jr., and Wendon Gillian Mbuh (UoY1). The supervisors were Deli Teri Tize and Afu Isaiah (UoY1), Michaela Pelican (UoC), Jonathan Ngeh (UoB), Alawadi Zelao (UoD).

fieldwork to Yaoundé and to open up the project to students and supervisors from other parts of Cameroon in order to accommodate different perspectives. In a back-and-forth process, they invited colleagues from the Universities of Bamenda (Jonathan Ngeh), Dschang (Alawadi Zelao) and Yaoundé 1 (Afu Isaiah) to jointly refine the project design and bring in students from their respective institutions. The project management rested with Michaela and Deli.

The research theme of future making was further developed on the basis of the shared interests of the scholars involved in the study. While the project aimed at capturing some of the policy changes in Cameroon in the past decade so as to understand their impact on Cameroonian youths and their perspectives of the future, the study also tried to understand current role models and notions of success among urban youths in Cameroon and the effects these factors had on return migrants and migrant remittances to the country. Importantly, the project aimed at promoting collaboration and shared knowledge production amongst students and supervisors based in the Global South and North.

The collaboration project consisted of three phases: The first phase happened remotely and comprised preparatory seminars at the partner universities which were adapted to the respective curricular requirements. While the students at the University of Cologne had the opportunity to attend two seminars geared towards the regional, thematic and methodological preparation of the planned collaborative research which were part of the curriculum, the Cameroonian partner universities were unable to accommodate the research preparation in their curricular structures. The supervisors and students had to make time besides their regular coursework to discuss selected readings and develop research ideas. To build a joint basis for the research collaboration, students in Cameroon and Germany were asked to write summaries of selected readings and share them in the group. They were also required to develop their research ideas in the form of a proposal and share it with all project members. Furthermore, students were encouraged to read all the proposals, identify possible research partners and explore possibilities for working together through one-on-one exchanges via email and WhatsApp. Importantly, German students were encouraged to seek research partnerships with their Cameroonian peers and vice versa.

In the second phase of the project, the students and supervisors teamed up in Yaoundé for a period of six weeks to conduct fieldwork, analyse data from the field, and share the preliminary findings with the local population and key stakeholders. This phase kick-started with an intensive five-day semi-

nar that enabled Cameroonian and German students and supervisors to come to know each other and further develop their joint research interests; to engage with the project's thematic and theoretical framework and advance discussions on an intercultural level to elaborate on their research methodology and finalise organisational arrangements for practical fieldwork. The seminar was followed by a four-week period dedicated to fieldwork. During this phase, the students worked in German-Cameroonian research partnerships. They had the opportunity to meet with their supervisors on a regular basis and sometimes be accompanied to the field. After the fieldwork phase was completed, the data collected was analysed in a five-day workshop. Students and supervisors discussed and synthesised their research findings and prepared a joint research report. The preliminary findings of the research project were presented at a public conference organised at the University of Yaoundé 1 and disseminated on national TV through the participation of selected students in a popular TV show.[2]

Importantly, the project enjoyed the support of the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences (FALSH) of the University of Yaoundé 1 which acted as the host university. They facilitated the German partners' visa procedures, welcomed project members and continuously provided infrastructural support, such as halls for seminars and the public conference. Funding for the research collaboration was provided by the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Cologne. The funding covered all research expenses of the Cameroonian and German partners, including transport, accommodation, and allowances for fieldwork. All students received the same fieldwork allowances, a decision that aimed at ensuring that they had equal financial resources. The supervisors received a moderate honorarium for their extra work. The responsibility for the project's accounting rested with the German partner.

2 Thanks to one of our student's personal connections to the Cameroon radio and television station (CRTV), we were invited to present the topic and preliminary findings of our collaborative research project in the morning talk show *Hello Cameroon*, which is broadcast live. When interviewed by the talk show moderator Gwendoline Egbe, Lotta Schütt (University of Cologne) and Hamza Dabo (University of Dschang) talked about Cameroonian youths' perspectives on making a future (*Hello Cameroon*, 30th August, 2018).

Our different positionalities in the project

As is often typical in academic research projects, ours went through distinct phases, starting with the conception of the project and leading through its execution to the completion process. While Michaela and Deli initiated the collaboration and were involved at the earliest stage, the other project members joined the team at different points in the process. The presence of some project members at the start of the project through to its completion placed them in a position to exert more influence on the research and subsequent outcome. Similarly, the University of Cologne and the University of Yaoundé 1 had more influence than the other partner universities by virtue of oversight responsibilities which they enjoyed as funders and hosts of the project. Finally, the relationship between students and academic staff was also hierarchical because of the very different roles that universities in general assign to students and academics. For example, the reports of students were evaluated and graded by the supervisors, an indication of the influence they have over students.

In terms of perceived power and privilege, our social positions as academics or students differed from each other because of our ascribed racial background (European and African), citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, age, and achieved status (professor, associate professor, lecturer, instructor and student). The circulation of power within the project took different forms, with some overt and some less obvious, as we shall see later. In the following account, we explore the power dynamics within the project and some of the tensions that we encountered. We will also reflect on how our approach to collaboration in research affected the goal of inclusion in knowledge production. The account we present is largely based on the experiences of Jonathan and Michaela. It is the account of two members of a larger research team comprised of 17 members who all experienced the project in unique ways.

Power asymmetry and structural inequalities

Jonathan

I was an instructor at the University of Bamenda at the time that I joined this project in 2018. In relation to my colleagues on the project, Michaela Pelican (professor), Alawadi Zelao (associate professor), Deli Terize and Afu Isaiah (lecturers), I was by far the most junior scholar. The positions of lecturer, associate

professor and professor in Cameroon are permanent (long term), while that of instructor is short term and very insecure. The University of Bamenda was initially not part of the project, and my role then was limited to mediation between students and the local community in Bamenda, one of the proposed field sites. About a month after my invitation to participate in the project, I suggested the inclusion of my students. I was pleased that no one objected to my suggestion despite the implication that it would require the universities of Yaoundé 1 and Dschang to give up some of the places for their students because the number of students for the project was fixed: six German students and six Cameroonian students.

My late invitation to join the project and the much later decision to allow students from the University of Bamenda to participate in it meant that there was little time for us to prepare: we needed to select students and go through relevant literature. We were not able to properly integrate the project into our study programme as we might have been able to do if we were present at its inception. After a discussion with my head of department and colleagues in Bamenda, we agreed that the participation of our students in the project should count as their internship course – a compulsory requirement for graduation. However, my work with the students faced some obstacles as the University of Bamenda refused to fully support our participation in the project. While my head of department endorsed the project, our application to formally participate in it was rejected by the department responsible for this kind of partnership at the university of Bamenda. It was rejected on the grounds that the selection of the students was not transparent. This was absurd because the applications were reviewed by all five supervisors in the project, and I worked closely with my head of department throughout the process. My head of department refused to give up and decided to let our students participate as interns in the project, a decision that was within his authority. Officially, this meant that I was allowed two visits to Yaoundé to assess the work of the students. In actuality, I needed to be present in Yaoundé throughout the duration of the project and later I was berated for this by an official at the University of Bamenda.

The power asymmetry evident in the above example played out on two levels that affected me and my students in a negative way. As a latecomer to the project, there was very little I could do to alter it, especially in a way that could accommodate some of my needs and those of my students. This is very typical of a collaborative partnership whereby the more powerful actors set the agenda and goals and lead the process. Obviously, this was not the motive of Michaela and her students who throughout the project did their very best to

ensure mutual respect and symmetrical collaboration between partners. It was at the institutional level that the power asymmetry played out most noticeably. The University of Cologne, like any other university, was primarily concerned with the interests of its own students and staff, and not necessarily those of the students and staff at the University of Bamenda who participated as partners in the project. Otherwise, a funding requirement for the project would require the collaboration of all partners starting at the level of inception. Internal power asymmetry within the University of Bamenda made my job in the project more difficult by creating additional challenges for me and the students. By rejecting our application to participate in the project, the university failed to acknowledge my supervisory work for the students.

Michaela

Being in charge of managing the project finances put me in a position of power, but this also came with a lot of responsibility and extra work. The project funding was provided by the University of Cologne and required detailed accounting of each and every expense, which posed formidable challenges given the widespread unavailability of receipts in Cameroon. Furthermore, the budget was rather limited, as it usually only covered the expenses of the Cologne students, but in our case was extended to also cover the costs of the Cameroonian collaboration partners. Making ends meet while accommodating unforeseen or changing expenses was a challenging task that absorbed more energy than planned.

Another challenge that affected the power balance involved the regulations and expectations of the partner universities in Cameroon which differed from the status quo in Germany. These included, for example, that in Cameroon academic staff are remunerated separately for all extracurricular activities, including student supervision, extra classes and participation in conferences. Given our limited budget and the different regulations at German universities that count such activities as part of academics' job obligations, I had to navigate a messy middle ground that accommodated both sides' contradictory rules and expectations. In the absence of remuneration for their participation in the project, I had to appeal to my Cameroonian partners to recognise the value of the intrinsic benefit of promoting their students and encourage them to invest in this collaboration with a view to possible future material or intellectual benefits. It worked out in this particular case because we could look back on a long history of collaboration that had produced benefits for all of us in the

past. However, there were differences in the commitment of the different partners, which was also owed to the fact that some of us had been collaborating much more closely in the past, while with others, the relationship was rather more instrumental.

On a general note, I acknowledge that all project participants – supervisors and students alike – were deeply committed to the project and to collaborative knowledge production. Also, I wish to acknowledge the significant support provided by the University of Yaoundé 1, which was also the result of the intense lobbying and following-up carried out by my collaboration partners. However, as Jonathan's discussion of his struggle with the university administration in Bamenda indicates, there are often also structural constraints which mean that the success or failure of a collaboration is not necessarily an indicator of the partner's strong or weak commitment to the joint endeavour.

Besides the personal relationship, institutional limitations also weighed heavily on the participants' commitment to the project. As Jonathan explained, the refusal of the University of Bamenda to act as an institutional partner complicated the collaboration. A practical solution was found on the level of the Department for the students to participate in the project by way of internship, which is a study requirement. However, this solution did not cover Jonathan's role as a supervisor in the collaborative research project, resulting in negative consequences, such as reprimands from the university hierarchy. Similarly, due to their different disciplinary background, the students from Dschang were constrained by the requirement to base their MA thesis on their participation in the research project, a limitation which ultimately impacted their motivation and performance. While it was never my intention to disadvantage or exploit some students over others, I realised that student participants from the different universities were unequally positioned in the way they could benefit from their participation in the research project. The majority of the students based in Cologne, Yaoundé and Bamenda were able to write their MA thesis on the basis of the collaborative research, whereas the students from Dschang encountered difficulties in this regard also due to their different disciplinary backgrounds and institutional limitations. However, accounting for these differences was out of my reach, as I had to rely on my Cameroonian partners to mitigate the regulations and risks of their respective institutions.

Facing tension and risk as part of the collaboration

Jonathan

The fieldwork started in Yaoundé with a five-day workshop. We rented accommodation in a gated compound where all the visiting project partners (supervisors and students) stayed for the duration of the programme. The initial arrangement was to provide students with a research allowance to cover fieldwork and living expenses. Under this arrangement, students from Cameroon were responsible for their accommodation. A few days before we convened in Yaoundé, Michaela became convinced that there was enough money to pay for the accommodation of all the visiting students from Bamenda, Cologne, and Dschang, and also that it would facilitate our work if we stayed together. This was good and welcome news for all of us. The students and colleagues from Yaoundé stayed in their own homes but met with us regularly either on campus, at our residence, or in the fieldwork locations.

Four of the supervisors, including Michaela and myself, arrived in Yaoundé about a week before the start of the project and the arrival of the visiting students. We met to make the final arrangements for accommodation, access to the seminar halls, transportation and everything that was needed for a smooth start. It was annoying that our host colleagues did not arrange these things, but I was not surprised because I already knew of the difficulties in Cameroon of getting things done in the absence of key actors and advance payment – therefore completion of the arrangements only became possible with the arrival of Michaela. After the arrival of the students, I found myself in the role of helping German students to navigate their new environment and advising Cameroonian students to be respectful of difference. I slowly stepped into this and other unassigned roles to ensure the best outcome and to avoid conflicts. As we moved forward in the project it became clear that the workload was uneven between the supervisors, not by design but because some were overwhelmed with other obligations outside the project, a factor which meant that they had to delegate their responsibility to others. I ended up supervising more students than the number assigned to me, and so did some other colleagues in the project. We politely discussed this problem a number of times, but very little changed.

My effort to help the students settle in seemed to have had the effect of making them feel comfortable in discussing their concerns with me. They expressed some of their dissatisfaction with the team and suggestions for im-

provement with me in private. A German student complained about the structure of the workshop, noting that it was more of a lecture, and students were given very little time to contribute to discussions. The student also complained that a Cameroonian supervisor spoke in a sexist and homophobic manner in the workshop. I raised these points with my co-supervisors, and we agreed to caution everyone to be careful with their language and be respectful of difference. Looking at this in hindsight, it seems as if we missed the opportunity to discuss pressing problems in the open and to involve the students in the conversation. But I also realise how difficult it would be to have an open discussion on the issue of sexuality in Cameroon where homosexuality is criminalised.

Students' dissatisfaction in the team was not only directed at the supervisors but extended to fellow students. Two of the German-Cameroonian student tandems did not work well because the students did not have a productive working relation. They resolved the problem by joining different groups. Even among those who got along well, we observed instances when the friendship fractured before eventually getting mended. None of the tensions between students ever got out of control and the supervisors never got directly involved. A few students complained to me about specific issues with their research partner or another student in the group, but they brought the issue to me mainly to seek advice on how to handle the situation. I remember discussing one of those complaints with Michaela after finding out that she heard about the problem from the student who brought it to my attention.

As mentioned earlier, the lack of a forthright and open discussion on discord characterised our approach to conflict within the team. This approach aims at containing and avoiding the escalation of any problem. It is grounded in the idea that conflict is bad and should be avoided at all costs (for a critique of this approach to conflict, see Galtung 2004). This view on conflict is reflected in the dominant approach to intercultural exchanges. Here, respect for cultural sensitivities is paramount. The implication of this approach to our work was that it kept us in our comfort zones, thereby effectively reifying cultural differences within the group and allowing us to take for granted the conventional notions that "otherwise" minorities. In other words, this prevented us from interrogating existing hierarchies that often get in the way of the coproduction of knowledge between actors who occupy different social positions (Aijazi et al. 2021; Zhou and Pilcher 2019).

Michaela

As Homi K. Bhabha, argues, everyone comes to the Third Space with their own background but tries to forget about it in order to create something together (Bhabha 2004). While Jonathan highlights minority-majority dynamics in his conflict assessment, the same situation presented itself quite differently to me due to my role as project coordinator and my positionality as a white female professor.

Given my role as the project coordinator, I felt it was my responsibility to mediate the different expectations and needs of all participants. On the one hand, I noticed the Cologne students' dissatisfaction with the teaching styles of some of the Cameroonian colleagues. On the other hand, I felt it was important to avoid imposing German teaching standards in a project aimed at North-South collaboration; that said, I also took into account the pre-existing power difference which was, in part, effected by the project's funding by the University of Cologne. Another factor that made it difficult to enter into an open discussion was the status and gender hierarchies that play out strongly in the academic context and disadvantage students, female and junior colleagues.[3] Thus, pleading with the students to be accommodating and tolerant of different teaching styles seemed more productive than opening up a critical discussion.

Similarly, dealing with the topic of homophobia was a challenge we had to forgo in this project for the following reasons: Firstly, my colleagues and I did not account for it in the planning and preparation of the project, for example, by including the topic and readings in our preparatory seminar. I believe this would have been an important step toward developing a common understanding, or at least more sensibility for the different perspectives. Secondly, the criminalisation of homosexuality in Cameroon made it a risky subject to discuss in public. However, Jonathan's appeal to supervisors and students to be respectful of difference in our interactions was well received and it facilitated the collaboration.

Project management also entails risk management. Often collaboration with the Global South is more prone to risk than collaboration within established research structures in the Global North. In our project, one of the risks

3 For example, Deli and I (Jonathan) had experienced the effects of these hierarchies in our interaction with members of the university administration when laying the ground for our collaborative project.

was the Anglophone conflict and its effects on the research collaboration. The conflict started in October 2016 as a political crisis, when Anglophones in the North West and South West regions took to the streets to peacefully protest against what has long been perceived as the political oppression of the Anglophone minority by the Francophone majority government. A year later, separatist groups called for the political independence of Anglophone Cameroon (also called Ambazonia) and were met with extreme force by the state military.[4] When planning our academic collaboration, we did not foresee the conflict's violent turn and the resulting insecurity in the Anglophone regions. We responded to the immediate risk by changing the project's regional focus and by integrating colleagues and students from two additional Universities, Bamenda and Dschang. Although the Anglophone conflict was not at the heart of our research project, it affected us in various ways. Several of our project partners, both students and colleagues, were directly confronted with the effects of the conflict: Jonathan and his students came from Bamenda, the capital of the Anglophone North West Region and a stronghold of the conflict. Some project members had family in the conflict region and feared for their safety; others sheltered displaced relatives in their homes. We occasionally talked about the conflict, sometimes in private conversations, sometimes in the group. However, without consciously agreeing to do so, we contained the subject and generally excluded it from our research. In retrospect, this may have been a missed opportunity to learn more about the Anglophone conflict, and how it affected the lives and future making of young people inside and outside the conflict region. At the same time, given different political opinions and the conflict's violent character, it would have been a risky and emotionally challenging subject that demanded more thorough preparation and support than we could provide in this collaboration project.

I agree with Jonathan that by diffusing potential conflict and appealing to mutual tolerance, we avoided descending into the insecurities of collaboration, which according to Zhou and Pilcher (2019) are part and parcel of reaching the Third Space. However, the stated goal of our collaboration was not to reach the Third Space – a concept we did not consciously work with at the time – but to guide students through the process of developing and executing a research project and to promote mutual learning and cultural exchange between project participants. In hindsight, I believe, for project partners to open up to each

4 For a more detailed account of the Anglophone conflict, see Bang and Balgah 2022; Pelican 2022.

other and willingly address negative experiences and divergent opinions, it is necessary that this is jointly agreed on as a common goal and joint way forward. That is, aiming at the Third Space needs to be set in advance as a goal of the project, including the methodological approach it demands. In our collaboration, this was not the case, and thus it is not surprising that we did not achieve or strive for it.

Towards joint production of knowledge in the Third Space: lessons learned

Jonathan and Michaela

This project was grounded in an inclusive and dialogic mode of knowledge production. We took active measures throughout the project to minimise power asymmetry resulting from the different access to resources between German and Cameroonian partners, different positionalities, gender, and age amongst other markers of difference. Although we aimed for a more democratic process of knowledge production and the erosion of established hierarchies in research, our approach did not go far enough in achieving these goals. The main reason for this shortcoming was that our idea of inclusion and collaboration during the project was imprecise and largely informed by general norms of good research practices in anthropology and the social sciences. With the hindsight benefit of reflecting on the project using the conceptual lens of Third Space, we gained a clearer picture of how our approach succeeded, and sometimes failed, in achieving the stated goal of recognition and inclusion of different voices and perspectives in the research process. We discuss some of the successes and failures in the next section.

Starting with access to resources, the major intervention in the project was the decision to distribute the limited financial resources for fieldwork equitably between the German and Cameroonian students. Without this intervention the German students would have received the most substantial share of the research money because it was provided by their home university. This was why the initial distribution of money for fieldwork allocated a smaller amount to Cameroonian students than the sum they received after the intervention. In this case, intervention was spearheaded by Michaela and the German students who were in a position to influence how the funding from the university of Cologne should be used. Given that students worked in pairs comprising of

a Cameroonian and German, the lack of the above intervention would have left Cameroonian students with limited financial resources and thus dependent on their German counterparts. Such dependency, as noted earlier, increases the influence of resource rich partners in the research process.

Secondly, allowing students to develop independent studies that were embedded in the main project ensured our goal of symmetrical collaboration. Independent studies sought to answer specific questions central to their aims. They focused on specific groups – students and job seekers, return migrants, cultural or ethnic groups and professionals – and utilised different conceptual and methodological tools that best suited each study. Students working in pairs, which were based on shared research interest, collaborated closely in fieldwork and later in the preliminary analysis of data and presentation of results. They developed question guides and conducted interviews either together, or individually, in a complementary manner. Broader collaboration within the larger group occurred at different stages of the research process. We developed a question guide to help generate data relevant to the general objective of the project. The questions contained in the guide complemented those of participants' individual studies. The results of preliminary findings were first presented and discussed internally, then revised and presented to the general public. However, in this process much of the data analysis was done individually, a point which we shall return to later in the discussion. The project ended with individual reports being produced by students, which they later developed for their bachelor's or master's thesis. The students' reports and the contributions from the supervisors are currently under review for publication in a working paper series at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Cologne. Our project allowed German and Cameroonian students/colleagues to be fully in charge of their individual research and its outcome and for all the individual researches to contribute to the overall findings of the main project. In this respect, we view the outcome of the project as the result of a joint effort that embraced diverse perspectives and inputs from all partners throughout the research process. This reflects some of the key ideas of knowledge production in the Third Space and our view of research as a collaborative process. It shows how intervention helped to upset the financial advantage of the German partners and the influence that came with it. Intervention also avoided the standard division of labour in North/South that often occurs in research partnerships and limits the role of colleagues in the South to conducting fieldwork while assigning the task of data analysis and writing to colleagues in the North.

Despite our best efforts and the stated achievements, our project did not fully attain the goal of collaboration. The limits of our approach to collaboration as understood through the premise of Third Space were strongest at the level of data analysis and interpretation of results, which constitute a key part of knowledge production. The limitation was because these tasks, as noted above, were largely done individually. Knowledge production in this case was an individual endeavour, which is at odds with the idea of collaboration in knowledge production as the cornerstone of our research partnership. Working individually in this way led to the loss of opportunities for jointly producing knowledge in an inclusive way that embraced diverse perspectives. It spared us the trouble of any disagreement or conflict that could arise from engaging with each other and working across differences. Unfortunately, knowledge production in the Third Space, as explained by Zhou and Pilcher (2019) and Aijazi et al. (2021), is a messy process that is sometimes characterised by conflict. We have already mentioned that our approach to contentious subjects and any form of tension was to de-escalate, often through avoidance. Two students – German and Cameroonian – had very different recollections and interpretations of an interview which they jointly conducted. Jonathan learned about this several months after the students had submitted their reports, and during a discussion of the interview with the German student as a possible case study for her dissertation. He double-checked with the student to make sure that they were talking about the same interview before pointing out the conflicting accounts. The German student was very certain about her account of the narrative and recollection of it. It seemed to Jonathan at the time that one of the students was wrong, but the question was whose account was accurate? Earlier in Yaoundé during our fieldwork, the aforementioned Cameroonian student had shared an observation with Jonathan, saying that during interviews the German student sometimes asked questions that had already been answered, thus implying that she had not understood or paid attention to the interviewee. While this statement suggests that the Cameroonian student might doubt the accuracy of her German partner's account, it also implies that the German student did follow-up questions to get a satisfactory account. Jonathan attributed the different approaches of the students to differences in their backgrounds (disciplinary and cultural among others) and to their stages of academic development. The German student was a master's student in social and cultural anthropology, and the Cameroonian an undergraduate student in development and communication studies. These are only a few possible answers to the question of why these two students gave such different accounts and interpreta-

tions of an interview which they had jointly conducted. If the project had established the framework of working in the Third Space, addressing these contradictions would have been a priority, possibly leading to a better understanding of what was said and why it was understood in specific ways and interpreted differently.

Conclusion

We began this article by drawing attention to the structures of exclusion in knowledge production that disadvantage colonised and formerly colonised peoples. Current debates on the decolonisation of higher education address these structural inequalities and call for the recognition of all parties involved and parity in the process of knowledge production. As a way forward towards decolonising the academy and promoting inclusive knowledge production, we have suggested pursuing a collaborative approach that respects a diversity of experiences and perspectives and interrogates existing hierarchies. We have outlined the productive potential of approaching collaboration through Homi Bhaba's concepts of the Third Space, which we understand as a critical moment of intervention that involves descending into the insecurities of collaboration and working through individual, cultural or structural differences. To provide concrete examples of the prospects and challenges of working in the Third Space, we have applied this analytical lens to the collaborative research and teaching project "Urban Youths' perspectives on making a future in Cameroon and beyond" which was realised in 2018 and involved students and scholars from Germany and Cameroon.

Our analysis has shown that achieving the Third Space is a challenging process that requires the commitment and consent of all participants to step out of their comfort zones. Many may not be willing to engage in this process as it can be time-consuming and emotionally taxing. To lay the ground for collaboration in the Third Space, it is thus important to start off with the concept kept clearly in mind and to jointly agree on undertaking the extra effort it will involve.

Furthermore, the analysis of our collaboration project has shown that decolonising higher education is not limited to actively addressing North-South hierarchies, but also acting on power differences (e.g. along the lines of academic status or gender) within university systems. In our project, the focus was on the learning process that students undergo in order to become experi-

enced researchers and work across cultural differences. Even though achieving parity in collaboration was among the project goals, academic hierarchies were maintained throughout the project as a way of efficiently structuring collaboration and sharing responsibilities and tasks. The project coordinators, supervisors and students had different roles and powers, with students supposed to conduct research under the guidance of the supervisors. For those preparing a collaboration project in the future, we recommend considering the following questions as part of the planning phase: Whom should the project benefit and in which ways? Whose collaboration is at the heart of the project (e.g. between students, between supervisors, between students and supervisors)? For which purpose and to what degree can, or should, we break down power hierarchies in research collaboration?

We are confident that collaborating in the Third Space is the way forward to inclusive knowledge production and the decolonising of academia. Descending into the uncertainties of collaboration and dismantling different power hierarchies will help us to recognise and value the experiences and perspectives of those disregarded so far, be they students, minority scholars, or the formerly colonised. More importantly, it will help us to produce inclusive knowledge and good science beyond the narrow confines of Western academia – and this is something which is critically needed to address today's global challenges.

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