Dissonant intimacies: South-South asymmetries, coloniality and failure.

Success and failure are not unknown to academics who's worth and work are increasingly measured according to these metrics. Research collaborations – particularly on externally funded grants – are key indicators of success in the neoliberal university, both for the individual researcher and for the global standing of the institution in question. In recent times, academic collaborations involving partners from the Global North and the South have come to include an ethical – and not only epistemic – promise: of "connection and agreement, connectedness and equality" (Coetzee 2019). But we know well how these initiatives tend to fall short of such promises and principles; they have proved, instead, to be "hot spots of contestation, disillusionment and complaint" (ibid). Set against such tensions, it would seem that a reorientation of economic and epistemic resources – and intellectual energy – from the North-South towards the South-South would act as a necessary corrective and remedy. Indeed, the "South-South" has emerged as an easy repository of positive affects and of decolonial futurity, given the asymmetries, inequities and ethical limits of decolonising the North. If North-South links are doomed to failure, then South-South collaborations are primed for success.

Anticipatory narratives of success can obscure specific histories and local contexts *within* the global South, and how they might be less amenable to relationships of equity, symmetry and care than they are to asymmetry, hierarchy and inequality. They can mask the coloniality of power at work in non-Western academic contexts and institutions of higher education, and indeed in the Northern orientations, dispositions and aspirations – epistemic habits – of individual researchers. For scholars in marginalised areas of research, like gender and sexuality who are also located outside of the metropole – the centre of knowledge production – there are also ambivalent investments in "the epistemic and material inequalities of global academic relations" (Pereira 2017).

These are issues of interest and concern to me, not least given my own positionality as a feminist scholar who is of the global South, trained and previously employed in the North, and now lives and works in the South. Since my move from a British university to a South African one, I have experienced more intimately – and frustratingly – the manifestly unequal ways in which the global production and circulation of knowledge works. Efforts to shift these dynamics have produced their own challenges and limits, however. In this essay, I reflect on one such effort – a research collaboration amongst African and Indian scholars of gender and sexuality – which emerged a space of dissonant intimacies, a term I take from Keguro Macharia, who speaks of the uses and failures of "blackness to create a shared ground".[1] Contrary to my assumptions and investments, this South-South collaboration failed

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[1] "I am interested in tracking the dissonant intimacies that emerge as black figures encounter each other: the uses of what Audre Lorde (1986: 61) terms "heterocetera" to create shared ground, the frictions created by geohistorical origin, the uses and failures of blackness to create shared ground, the uses of what Tavia Nyong'o (2014: 76) terms "critical fabulation" to imagine conversations that might occur. Location matters".

to provide "shared ground', for connection, reciprocity, or feminist solidarity. As opposed to disrupting Northern hegemony and privilege, it revealed both the coloniality of power and how it manifested, differently, in two distinct locales in the global South. My reflections here are speculative, drawing on my own singular and highly subjective experience of leading a research project. But they are part of larger debates (to which I hope they contribute), whether to do with current decolonising imperatives, within higher education, or appreciating the complexities of global academic collaboration and exchange, or even the operation of power in a global epistemic order, more generally. At the very least, I hope my reflections nuance our continuing tendency to assume that power operates in singular, unidimensional ways (flowing from the North to the South alone, for instance).

The unanticipated failures of this one South-South collaboration serve not to produce more successful collaborations and projects in future. Failure offers an alternative path. Feminists, Judith Halberstam (2011) tells us, are no strangers to failure. They have also gained more from failure than they have from success, given the unexpected pleasures of failing at womanhood and of queer possibilities. Epistemic and institutional failures might similarly afford feminists more knowing ways of developing new academic practices, relations, exchanges, and institutional sites for decolonial thought and flourishing. Dissonant intimacies and failures might well inform a new ethics and episteme that could even decolonise.

Student movements, decolonial options and tensions in the global South

Thanks, largely, to recent student mobilisations across university campuses, the call to decolonise higher education has become an urgent and familiar one. In South Africa, the RhodesMustFall (RMF) and FeesMustFall (FMF) movements of 2015-2016 made clear that universities have to change materially but also epistemically– thereby attaching their calls for abolishing tuition fees to calls for decolonising the university. Their demands and struggles, across South African university campuses, made additionally clear only the obvious, that the end of colonisation – decolonisation as a political event – did not mean the end of colonial modes of knowing, doing and being, or the "coloniality of power" (Quijano). Coloniality, "refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism" (and decolonisation does not amount to decoloniality; Torres p. 243 in Ahmed).[2] US-based Latin Americanist Torres, alongside Walter Mignolo, Quijano and others (who are best associated with decolonial thinking and scholarship) stress the epistemic dimensions of this endurance, in their specific calls to decolonize Eurocentric knowledge (see Mignolo DSM 54).

In the university where I teach and work, in South Africa, the coloniality of knowledge was experienced in highly embodied ways. From the content of university curricula to the design and naming of buildings to the kinds of bodies that felt most welcomed in its corridors, the university was an intense site of the endurance of a colonial and racial matrix of power. This is not surprising. The coloniality of power manifests strongly as a coloniality of knowledge (Quijano; Bhambra), making universities obvious sites of contestation and struggle. Students activists in South Africa – "Fallists" as they came to be known locally and globally –exposed the coloniality of knowledge/power in multiple locales, moving quickly beyond the university to call into account the ANC state itself. Within the university, they demanded a redressal of

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[2] This point is generally rehearsed in postcolonial theory, as are critiques of modernity (see, on this point, Bhambra).

coloniality in a decolonised curriculum, the removal of colonial iconography and symbols on campus, and the better representation of black students and staff. And through intersectionality, they critiqued inherited anti-black political repertoires for their gender blindness and insisted that decolonial futures must be gender just ones (see Roy forthcoming).

Ahmed, in a remarkable doctoral dissertation on RMF (a critical predecessor to FMF), theorises these movements as acts of "epistemic disobedience", ones that seek to "delink" from the university's colonial epistemic practices, to generate "decolonial options".[3] Fallist experiments can be seen as the materialisation of a specific decolonial option, "to create a crack in the university's wall of epistemic coloniality" (Ahmed). He is quick to stress, however, that student activism cannot be reduced to decolonial theories. On the contrary, and in ways that echo how Mignolo and associates centre the production of decolonial knowledge in social movements and in communities-in-struggle, it was student movements that squarely placed decolonising imperatives in the mainstream.

But the institutionalisation of a decolonial framework is not without its tensions or limits. The Bolivian/Aymara feminist sociologist, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui accuses elite Southern intellectuals like Mignolo of building "a small empire within an empire" (98), which reproduces historical processes of extraction and appropriation. She writes:

"Ideas run, like rivers, from the south to the north and are transformed into tributaries in major waves of thought. But just as in the global market for material goods, ideas leave the country converted into raw material, which become regurgitated and jumbled in the final product. Thus, a canon is formed for a new field of social scientific discourse, postcolonial thinking. This canon makes visible certain themes and sources but leaves others in the shadows".

New gurus who create new canons can end up "neutralising" practices of decolonisation and their radical or empowering potential.[4] To counter this neutralization, Cusicanqui (2012) suggests "constructing South-South links" that will circumvent northern hegemony by creating the space for dialogue and knowledge production "among ourselves", by "affirming our bonds with theoretical currents of Asia and Africa" (p. 107- from Ahmed).[5]

Cusicanqui's comments are significant in several ways. What she notes about the decolonial becoming a new academic canon in the North, especially in the US, has already materialised

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[3] For Mignolo (also Mignolo and Walsh and especially Ahmed), decolonial delinking – also called epistemic disobedience – entails decentering Western epistemic hegemony, (re)claiming what is hidden from or silenced by Western dominance, and enabling the proliferation of decolonial thought or "decolonial options". Taking Mignolo's decolonial insights to the RMF student movements, Ahmed suggests that the "decolonial option" (p. 3) offers a path that connects people and places that have been "classified as underdeveloped economically and mentally" (or as affected by the colonial wound – Mignolo) (p. 3).

[4] Similarly, Nirmal Puwar takes to task Connell and Santos in their self-appointed roles as "academic ambassadors of the global South to the North". Making the same critique around new gurus and canons, Puwar additionally notes the hyper masculine persona of self-appointed global ambassadors of decolonial/Southern theory.

[5] See also Tuck and Yang (2012) and Walsh 2018 on the dangers of the co-option and commodification of decoloniality, especially when decolonisation is reduced to a metaphor, abstract from issues of land and material reparation (Tuck and Yang).

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to such an extent that the "decolonial turn" appears to have little to no relevance to scholars and activists in the South (the RMF/FMF movements constitute the exception).[6]

As Bhakti Shringarpure puts it:

"In debates going on today, there is a kind of division between Global North and Global South scholarship when it comes to thinking about decolonization. For example, there is the complaint that decolonial work does not include Global South thinkers and that it has become co-opted by moneyed institutions in the Global North".

Shingarpure places this complaint in a conversation between herself and Priyamvada Gopal whose response is also worth sharing:

"Decolonization is precisely about centering marginalized perspectives, but it's also about undoing boundaries. And therefore, voices from the Global South have to be brought to a position of equality, but equally, one would need to be attentive to hierarchies *within* the Global South. It is not then a simple matter of saying, "Well, we will bring in a South African or a Brazilian or an Indian intellectual." Yes, those voices need to be brought in, but other kinds of hierarchies also need to be thought of"

Gopal's qualifiers to South-South relations – that they should be non-colonizing, given the incommensurability and hierarchies within the South – are significant to think alongside Cusicanqui's also significant call for constructing South-South solidarities (indeed, Gopal draws on Cusicanqui in this interview and in other work). These are not separate or oppositional projects: of demanding inclusion from those marginalised at the (colonial/global) periphery, but also recognising that the periphery is not a place outside of power. A good example that Gopal mobilises is that of caste in South Asia, a specific instance of the coloniality of power. A decolonial framework can serve to unmask and undo Brahmanical supremacy and caste capitalism – that operate like white supremacy and racial capitalism – by holding to account native hierarchies and tyrannies inflicted by native elites. This offers a more nuanced – albeit demanding view – of what it might mean to engage the South, in the name of decolonising. Indeed, Gopal advocates what she calls a more demanding decolonial project, in *both* the metropole and the global periphery.

The Fallists too demanded more, and raised, in turn, the stakes of what it might mean to decolonise. Achille Mbembe writes of their injunction to decolonise as a claim to belonging (see also Nuttall):

"It has forced upon us new questions about what counts as knowledge and why It has also obliged society at large to reflect on whether academic institutions can be turned into spaces of radical hospitality and if so, how, for whom and under what conditions; or whether they are simply sites that replay power relations already existing within society".

Grace Musila imagines a different kind of hospitality, which she does not find in research collaborations between Northern and Southern partners:

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[6] "In decolonized India, the laudable ideal of public and affordable higher education was not accompanied by sufficient rethinking of the content and structure of colonial education, or of imagining what a decolonized pedagogy would look like" (Loomba, 2016)

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"What would emerge out of these projects if, rather than being encouraged to adopt the registers and theories legitimised by the Northern academic machinery, they were encouraged to pursue the questions they deem relevant, on their own terms and in their own registers? How would the texture of the academy change if it was hospitable to these registers and textures, rather than panel-beating them into adopting the monochromatic registers and accents of thought legitimised by the North?"

The South-South exchange that constitutes the grounds for my reflections here could well be considered an experiment in new forms of material and epistemic hospitality. It sought to foreground precisely those registers and textures of knowledge-production that were not included in, or were even illegible to Northern-driven "homogenised modes of thought" (into which African scholars "must fit or perish"; Musila). In, moreover, supporting and connecting feminist scholars in different parts of the global South, it foregrounded inclusion and belonging for those marginalised by Northern institutions but also, ironically, less visible to each other. But ultimately, its failures force a more difficult and demanding take on decolonising that might well complicate assumptions that South-South links will "allow us to break the baseless pyramids of the politics and academies of the North" (Cusicanqui).

Theorising gender from and across the South

Funded by a major US philanthropic foundation, the research project, that I was the Principal Investigator of over 2019-2022, was hosted at Wits and intended to support new scholarship on gender and sexuality across Africa and India. The project was organised around particular themes but also motivated by specific aspirations. One such aspiration was promoting feminist theory from the South, in a clear move against historical divisions of epistemic labour, where the South provides the raw data for metropolitan feminist theorising. Reading Hountondji's analysis of this division of labour into the contemporary landscape of producing sociological knowledge of gender, Connell writes:

"The global periphery still exports data and imports applied science, the global metropole is still the centre of theory and methodology. An international circulation of knowledge workers accompanies the international flows of data, concepts and techniques. Workers from the periphery travel to the metropole for doctoral training, sabbaticals, conferences or better jobs; workers from the metropole frequently travel to the periphery to collect data, rarely to get advanced training or to learn theory" (see also Connell 2007).

As Connell also rightly notes, there are material reasons for the endurance of these dynamics, namely the vast difference in the "scale of resources available for scholarship" when it comes to the North in contrast to the South. These material differences not only mean that gender studies – even in more resource-rich and privileged universities in the South– end up being poorly institutionalised, but it also shapes what kind of research is ultimately undertaken.

I will return to these material and ideological dynamics below. For the moment, let me say that none of these – the global economy of knowledge-production, processes of extraversion, the division between theory and data, and the practical problems experienced even in more privileged universities in the South – were absent from the conceptualisation of this project. The imperative to build theory – as opposed to provide data – meant, for instance, directing funds to support staff and postgraduate research in areas not conventionally funded, such as African feminist and especially queer theory. Other initiatives included a feminist theory reading group, writing workshops, and curriculum development workshops with the explicit

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aim of "decolonising" gender and queer studies (besides the more standard promises to undertake original research and to publish).

A further genius of the project was to envision the theorising of gender in a comparative and connected way, *across* countries and continents of the South. The project was thus multi-institutional and multi-locational, incorporating universities in East and South Africa and India. Again, this ambition had both intellectual and material grounds (and implications). Intellectually, it came with the promise of decolonising gender by seeking to establish how gender was both "done" and "undone" in and across distinct colonial and postcolonial contexts, rather than treat gender as a universal category. Shared histories of colonialism and common postcolonial patterns – in which women's rights were key to newly decolonised state-making practices, for instance – meant that the regions proposed constituted an amenable ground for comparative and connected thinking. But it also served other aspirations that perhaps we did not fully register at the time. By bringing together researchers on gender and sexuality in different locations in the global South, the project acted as an institutional materialisation of the promise of transnational feminism, or "an approach focused on building critical and careful solidarities between feminists in various locations" (Tambe and Thayer).[7] Even without employing an explicitly transnational feminist research vocabulary (in contrast to a decolonial one), the project operated transnationally – by foregrounding voices neglected in the feminist canons of the west; repositioning peripheral sites as ones of active feminist theorising; and drawing on and linking feminist knowledge-production in different regions (see also Connell and Roberts).

In proposing, moreover, collaborations between South-South partners, the project was also well placed to avoid some of the worst pitfalls of North-South academic partnerships. Driven by the top-down agendas of British and European funder streams – in the name of internalisation and even "ethical collaborations" to reverse North-South power dynamics – large pots of funding are increasingly directed toward multi-country collaborations. And yet these have been experienced by Southern collaborators as amounting to more of the same: extractive and unequal (with the South-based researcher acting as a mere "data mule"; Vagisha), and centering "Northern conceptions of what quality scholarship looks like" (Musila; see also Neelika; Gunasekara).

Of course, our South-South project was enabled by the "Northern academic machinery" (Musila). This should hardly come as a surprise. Funding for the humanities in particular is dependent on the magnanimity of Northern donors given its paucity in our own contexts. But our funder by no means called the shots. This was a product more of accident than design. Given the Northern funders recent – and sudden – reorientation of priorities away from the South toward the North, it was uninterested in the last beneficiaries of its benevolence on the African continent. Such a shift in funding priorities – which left many projects and institutions vulnerable in its wake – also revealed the deep circuits of dependence in the global South on the caprices of philanthropes in the North. In the life of our research project, Northern voices and players were almost entirely absent. Whether in public facing events or

[7] In a recent volume called *Transnational Feminist Itineraries*, editors Ashwini Tambe and Millie Thayer reflect on the history of the term and how it came to refer to non-US feminisms in other parts of the world – contra black feminisms in the US. This would explain the term's limited currency in the rest of the world, even as postcolonial and transnational feminisms are recognised as key predecessors to more current decolonial variants – through critiquing imperial forms of knowing and foregrounding subjugated knowledges (see also Asher?; Piedulae and Rishi).

in actual publications, we prioritised feminist scholarship – and scholars – from the South, which grew to include Mozambique, Angola, Brazil and Lebanon. Audiences routinely commented on the uniqueness of such a space – as constituting a genuine alternative to Northern hegemony and for building epistemological infrastructures across the South that were also, of course, feminist and queer.

The two partners on the project were in India and Uganda respectively. One was a gender and sexuality studies research center in a new private university. The other was an institutionally older school of women and gender studies, which also included a teaching component – on gender and development, primarily – and a robust research profile. With the African institution, the collaboration never really took off, except for our engagements with an individual collaborator and student; our African partners were unresponsive to our interests. The Indian collaboration was, on the face of it, a success. We co-organised a research meeting, supported staff projects across the university, and funded a full postdoctoral position. But the collaboration failed to provide meaningful and reciprocal intellectual exchange – our Indian partners appeared to perceive us as funders rather than as their intellectual equals. Both partners echoed deeply rooted epistemic dispositions – habits – that were not reducible to individual personalities or even institutional pressures but spoke of longer colonial logics and newer neoliberal demands. These were the conditions that produced a terrain of complex and uneven relationships amongst feminist collaborators in the global South – of dissonant intimacies.

From data to (queer) theory: the Indian Ivy League

"… rich peripheral countries, which have the economic resources to produce alternatives, but not necessarily the desire" (Connell 68).

"… WGFS scholars (in the centre and (semi-)periphery) have complex, ambivalent and not always fully acknowledged investments in the epistemic and material inequalities of global academic relations" (Pereira 170).

Connell makes her comments in relation to Australia, which she describes as moving from a site of difference to one of similarity with the metropole. While Australian sociology's original role was to be – like the colonies – a "data mine, a source of ethnographic examples of the primitive" (77), it eventually repositioned itself as making theory, through the adoption of metropolitan theory and methods (by a new generation of researchers). For scholars located in the periphery who are also in fringe disciplines, repositioning might be even more dependent on forms of credibility and legitimacy that only the North can provide. In her reading of the "epistemic status" of women, gender and feminist studies in a semi-peripheral country like Portugal (semi-peripheral as being ambiguously positioned in global hierarchies; Santos; see also Wallerstein), Pereira (2017) shows how what is modern and foreign – "the modern foreign" – plays a key role in strengthening the field's claims and legitimacy locally, even as it normalises and reproduces the hegemony of Anglo-American feminist theory and limits the flourishing of local knowledge.

The "Indian Ivy" I consider represents both dynamics: of feminist scholars in semi-peripheral or peripheral countries who have ambivalent relations with global hierarchies given the lack of local support and credibility, *and* of a rich institution in a peripheral country with the resources but not the will to produce an alternative to the coloniality of knowledge.

Indian higher education is dominated by professionalised degrees, the fetishization of technical knowledge, and the lack of interest and investment in liberal arts training. Even the better public universities suffer from institutional challenges – like corrupt bureaucracies; uneven teaching and a lack of accountability to students; divides between teaching and research and a lack of funding for research; social inequities; and increased government censorship – that are more intensely felt in the poorly funded humanities streams.[8] In a useful overview of the institutionalisation of women's studies in Indian universities, writes Sinha Roy (2014):

"In the increasingly neoliberal economic and political environment of contemporary India, where the government is emphasizing 'vocationalization of education' to meet the requirements of becoming a 'knowledge-based economy', academic training in nontechnical disciplines is under fire. The struggle to maintain government support for research and teaching-oriented social science and humanities disciplines is one of the most urgent issues facing the Indian academia"

The development of women's studies can be traced to central government support for the setting up of women's studies research centers in public universities, in the 1980s, but with older origins in the Indian women's movements' demands from the 1970s. The close links between the women's movement and women's studies oriented research away from purely cerebral pursuits to those worthy of activist investments and perceived to be productive of tangible social change (see Roy 2009). Not surprisingly, then, early governmental guidelines prioritised, for women's studies research centres, "socially relevant activities" (Sinha Roy). These were also teaching heavy sites – in contrast to what the nomenclature of what a research centre might suggest – and invariably dominated by faculty with training in the social sciences (economics and sociology). As I go onto explain of the African landscape in researching gender and sexuality– to which these national research centres are highly comparable – the institutional conditions under which women's studies took root and developed constituted an uneven ground for the expansion of more theoretical horizons. They proved more conducive to importing metropolitan theory and giving it a "local gloss", than developing distinctive local theories, for instance (Connell 176-7).[9]

A recent crop of private universities – such as the one with which we partnered – emerged, from the mid-2000s, to offer a "premium" liberal arts education. Their establishment and (rapid) growth were helped by the dynamics of India's economic liberalisation, donations from major Indian corporate tycoons, and even amendments to laws governing private universities (Scroll). Modelled on the liberal arts colleges in the US and acting as a foil to the systemic challenges faced by Indian public universities, they offered major and minor courses; actively recruited foreign faculty, both Indian and white; and built active transnational links (with top global universities, especially in the US from where trained faculty arrived). These institutions were thus geared, as "institutions of excellence", toward a *global* higher education landscape (Scroll; Sreeram). Even as they charged exorbitant fees – 6 lakhs of INR compared to 15,000 in a public university – they had little trouble attracting

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[8] The twinning of 'saffronization' and 'financialization' have placed Indian universities under greater and newer forms of threat – see entire 2016 issue on the university published in Café Dissensus.

[9] Connell attributes this tendency to the urgent need for conceptual frameworks for (feminist) movement organising, and the availability of publics and audiences (for Subaltern Studies, in particular) in the west.

elite Indian students (see Sreeram). Quickly establishing themselves as the preferred choice over a liberal arts education in a public university, they also acted as launch pads for further education in the metropole. Not surprisingly, and especially given the lack of affirmative action or "reservation" in private universities, the diversity of the student body has been up for questioning; as per a 2018 survey, 80% of students came from upper-caste families.

The director of the research centre on gender and sexuality that we partnered with was, as with many of the faculty associated with it, trained in the North, especially the US (a departure from the usual academic trajectory toward Britain). The "foreign-educated" faculty is another well-known feature of private universities. With degrees from top US-UK universities, including Oxbridge and indeed, the Ivy Leagues, they represent a new (academic) migratory trend: of Indian academics trained in the North returning to the South, in a reverse brain drain phenomenon (later trends of "poaching" faculty from public universities to private ones have been observed; see Baviskar). On return, they maintain their networks in the North and even allegiance to Northern debates and especially, to US-made theories. While Indian intellectuals – from the Subaltern Studies school to metropolitan feminists, as Connell shows– have always deployed Northern concepts to understand Southern realities, they have also engaged in spirited debate over their limits and possibilities (see, for instance, Menon and John on "intersectionality"). An earlier generation of Indian feminists were also often defensive of their use of western theories, even shying away from calling themselves feminist (see Roy 2009 for overview). In contrast, these feminist scholars appear far more at ease with deploying Northern/US theory, possibly emanating from a greater embeddedness in transnational communities, and a greater proclivity to use those links to build credibility, visibility and recognition at local and global scales. Once again, they can be compared to a certain generation of Australian researchers who Connell observes as developing greater skills in using metropolitan epistemic tools and infrastructures in their own contexts and to their own advantages – through publishing in metropolitan journals and presses, in using metropolitan concepts, even to "offer credible interventions in metropolitan debates" (83).

Given the precarious life of state-funded women's studies centres in India, it is not surprising that these new liberal arts institutions would be amenable to the research and teaching of gender and sexuality. Emerging post-liberalisation by which time the historical links between the women's movement and women's studies had somewhat weakened – owing to forces of neoliberalism– new centres of research possibly felt less the weight of this history.[10] In other words, they were liberated from a previous era's worries around theory and practice and took inspiration from new issues and concerns relating to liberalised India. For instance, the Indian women's movement had tended to dismiss sexuality, as a site of activist mobilising and of knowledge-production. Sexuality as it attached to questions of desire and pleasure was far from an agenda of knowledge production that felt it had to urgently respond to women's violence and victimisation. Public universities were thus seen to be comfortable with teaching gender, conceived around the stability of the category of "woman" but less so, around sexuality, especially through a queer lens. At new private institutions, students demanded a "queer" curriculum, which also reflected the sensibilities of a public queer rights movement that gained huge popularity amongst the metropolitan middle-classes from the late 1990s, both straight and queer.

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[10] On economic liberalisation as weakening the link between women's studies and the women's movement, see, for an overview, Roy 2009.

The centre we partnered with was certainly unique in prioritising sexuality and queer theorising. But there were other ways in which it stood out in a field of local knowledge production in a particular time. Unlike women's studies research centres that effectively acted as teaching departments (in a locale where teaching and research were set apart from one another; Loomba 2016), this centre was free to undertake a range of intellectually capacious research and public facing activities, like seminars, conferences, and other events. It curated, in other words, public conversations, which gained far greater visibility during the Covid-19 pandemic as they moved and travelled online. Over the pandemic years alone (2020-2021), it hosted successive and consecutive seminar series, featuring numerous guest speakers, either singularly or jointly with international partners (this was also the time of our research collaboration). These were prominently advertised on their social media channels (especially Instagram) and drew robust and regular audiences. In contrast, JNU's women's studies department gained visibility – and notoriety – for merely one online talk with an overseas feminist scholar on Kashmir. At a time when public universities are increasingly targets of repression of the ruling Party, our partner appeared to be in a moment of expansion – of developing new public archives, public spaces and publics, within the terms of engagement set by a private institution.

If we return to Pereira's comments, it is unsurprising that this moment of expansion – of gaining visibility and credibility – relied fundamentally on the modern foreign: on a local dependence on and demonstration of transnational links, on having the presence of Western scholars in local spaces, and on an absolute allegiance to metropolitan theory. The events and activities of our partner – especially online, during the pandemic – operated with a deep orientation toward the US, reinstating its status as *the* site and centre of knowledge-production around sexuality and queerness. For instance, an extension of their "flagship" speaker series – hosted online over 2020-1 – featured scholars from North American universities, white and Indian, in conversation with a scholar based in India (though not always; in some instance, two US based academics conversed, one white, one Indian). The series featured, perhaps even for the first time in the context of Indian higher education, celebrity (white) queer theorists – Judith Butler, Jack Halberstam and Lee Edleman. Speakers, I was later told, were selected given their popularity amongst local audiences (having a broad reach was a motivating factor of the series as a whole). Whatever the driving forces behind choices for speakers, there is little doubt that the curatorial practices intended to introduce to local audiences a canon of white metropolitan queer theory.[11]

The chosen format of the series was also revealing – two speakers responded to a singular question in a polemical style ("what is sexuality"; "is it a right"). The format demanded the adoption of a mode of speaking "from nowhere", or in universals or abstractions – the principal way in which Theory, especially Western theory, tends to be recognised as such

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[11] White queer theory can also be thought of as constituting a form of "symbolic capital for individuals and groups who use intellectual currency to gain access to the centre" (Lewis). Desiree Lewis makes these remarks in usefully reminding us of the distinct origins of professionalisation – and depoliticization – of gender research in Africa and in the North. Whereas in Africa, the professionalisation of gender studies was enabled by and consolidated neoliberal development logics, it took the form, in the North, of the "elevation of knowledge as cultural capital". New theoretical trends, like postmodernism and poststructuralism were seen to enhance a growing gulf between academic research and the general public, including women's rights organisations. Similar anxieties – around theory – have been articulated in the Indian context, especially as taking women's studies concerns away from their historic intimacy with or even accountability to the women's movement.

(applicable to everyone, everywhere, at all times).[12] White queer theorists spoke consistently in universals – and even mobilised a "we", or a shared community of interlocutors – while most of the Indian speakers drew on the particularity of context and culture ("Bollywood"; laws in India, and so on). All speakers evoked categories – queerness, queer negativity, normativity, transness – and critical frameworks – critical race theory, disability studies, Afropessimism, new indigenous studies, besides queer theory (and yes, even the decolonial) – and theorists (Foucault, Sylvia Winter, Fred Moten, Povinelli) – familiar to those who traffic regularly in and perform US queer theory. They – or the series, rather –assumed a public who was similarly familiar with the terms of engagement on offer; a public for who the North/US/whiteness was the default frame of reference – the "citational foundation" (Arondekar) – when it came to theorising queerness. While individual speakers engaged their own modes of Western "de-linking", even decolonising, the curatorial process assumed and naturalised a mono intellectual culture, or one that was "epistemologically homogenous" (Musila).[13]

African feminists and queer theorists were not invited to speak at these events or future ones, which were slightly more diverse in terms of speakers (even as our events included participants from this Indian institution). They remained behind-the-scenes, invisible funders of projects, the makers of epistemic infrastructures but with little epistemic status of their own. Macharia gestures toward similar asymmetries when it comes to what is now considered "queer African studies" in the US, which does not, however, engage the conceptual frameworks available in African studies:

"Reading through this emerging body of work, it is difficult to imagine that African philosophers, including John Mbiti, Kwasi Wiredu, and Nkiru Nzegwu, have ever written anything that conceptualizes personhood, individuality, or community. […] the work of thinking through queer Africa will be mostly illegible to US and European ears trained by and embedded in LGBTI studies. Or, as is happening too often, queer African voices and experiences will be absorbed as "data" or "evidence," not as modes of theory or as challenges to the conceptual assumptions that drive queer studies".

Macharia makes these remarks in resisting the "area studies" logics of colonial epistemologies, which centres the North as the site of knowledge production. Such logics also mediate knowledge exchanges, flows and relations in the rest of the world – "through the maps of the world it created, about the maps of the world it still uses". The "African" may not, then, be easily placed in conversation with the "Indian/Asian". And only either the "African" or the "Indian/Asian" can speak from a site of difference or particularity to the universality of Northern theory (one native informant at a time, please!). These "geodisciplinary designations"– African/Asian – make little sense outside of colonial

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[12] Claims to universality lie, of course, at the heart of Northern theory, while "Southern theory" is marginalised as the site of difference/otherness/particularity. Indeed, western theory can operate as universal and natural precisely through such processes of othering and exclusion. The decolonising move thus becomes one of showing and disrupting "the singularity of dominant western knowledge" (J. I. Fúnez-Flores and J. Phillion 43), rather than merely including alternatives, or epistemic positions rendered marginal or residual by western/northern dominance. Simple patterns of inclusion – add and stir approaches – do "nothing to change the terms of intellectual production in the present" (Connell xi).

[13] "Monocultures do not produce good thinking and are in themselves a lethal form of unmarked narrow identity politics", remarks Gopal.

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rationalities and the North, and yet they, alongside US theoretical vocabularies, assemble and accrue value and credibility in all our worlds (Macharia).[14]

In protest, Macharia populates his work with names of African scholars, thus choosing to remain "illegible and uninteresting to mainstream queer studies". For our Indian partners, it was certainly easier to reach for a Judith Butler, Lee Edleman and Jack Halberstam than it was for a Zethu Matebeni, Stella Nyazi, Pumla Gqola, Sylvia Tamale or even Keguro Macharia. They had the resources and even the access – through our project – to shape publics differently, but not the desire. If we reconsider the comments of Connell and Pereira that I started with – on the hegemonic status of metropolitan theory; the fringe status of certain disciplines in peripheral countries, and the asymmetries of a global epistemic order – then "choice" perhaps doesn't cut it. Non-Western scholars of gender and sexuality have little choice than to rely on the "modern foreign" when it comes to strengthening their own claims and the epistemic status of emerging fields. However, these are the patterns of building a homogenous canon and of the stifling of local concepts and collaborations with local partners/audiences, as Pereira reminds us, but also of being less hospitable to the rich intellectual traditions of other peripheral regions (see, again, Connell on Australia).

If our Indian partner proved inhospitable to African feminist thought, one needs to ask how hospitable it was to non-elites amongst its own? After all, a local public in which the likes of Judith Butler, Lee Edleman and Jack Halberstam are imagined as having massive popularity is probably one which is quite exclusive – English-speaking, elite, metropolitan and upper caste. Sreeram calls the private universities, "the Indian Ivys for the upper castes". Besides the caste homogeneity of the staff and student body – that might be compared to the caste kinship that Subramanian finds in the IITs – Sreeram shows how internal institutional culture is geared toward the flourishing of the upper caste/ "savarna" student alone. It is also easier for the India's Ivys to show solidarity with BLM struggles in the US than it is for them to take seriously caste discrimination, dalit resistance and dalit emancipatory pedagogies in their own midst.[15] Coloniality comes in many forms, constituting landscapes of hostility and hospitality that haunt each other. Likewise, decolonisation must entail not merely a decentering – or provincializing –of the US, but a reckoning with multiple and scattered hegemonies (Grewal and Kaplan).

African data, global supply chains and knowledge asymmetries

[14] Macharia's intervention is part of more recent drives, in queer studies, to take seriously questions of geopolitics, the global, transnational and the regional, and to, concurrently, decentre the US (Arondekar and Patel; Bakshi; Rao; Savci). These calls have emanated from queers-of-colour, within and outside of the US, including by scholars located in India and Africa (Mokkil; Macharia; Tamale). They stem from a fatigue with the exhaustive whiteness of queer theory, the limits of Euro-American epistemologies for understanding queerness, and how queer studies operates as a "by-product of an extractive US-centred knowledge supply chain" (Arondekar 2022). Arondekar turns to Rao's recent book on homosexuality/homophobia in India and Uganda as a rare instance of thinking comparatively within a South-South postcolonial framework.

[15] Indian public universities have emerged sites of new forms of resistance and protest against casteism in Indian society, from which universities themselves – both public and private – are hardly exempt. On the coming of age of dalit bahujan student politics on campuses, see Hany Babu https://cafedissensus.com/2016/09/15/converging-struggles-and-diverging-interests-a-look-at-the-recent-unrest-in-universities/

"It is sometimes assumed that the 'indulgence' of deconstructing discourses should be undertaken mainly in Northern contexts and that 'practical' and 'material' struggles must be paramount in the South" – Lewis

While the Indian partners of our South-South project repositioned themselves as makers of theory – thus gaining proximity with the metropole and establishing distance from the periphery – the Ugandan partners appeared, in sharp contrast, to prefer their historic role as data-producers, meeting Northern needs in other, historically enduring and contextually specific ways. It participated in an asymmetrical geopolitical knowledge system, in which the South functions as the producer and exporter of data, with the North assuming for itself the role of processing such data and producing theory – universal, scientific, normative. Both exhibited little will "to link with the intellectual projects of other regions of the periphery", or with one another, in ways that the collaboration made possible (Connell 86).

It is not without irony that feminist scholars located in India and Uganda felt they had little to meaningfully share. As newly decolonised "Third World" countries, they have, in fact, much in common when it's comes to institutional histories of women's studies (much more than South Africa, a settler colonial state, for instance). The origins of women's or gender studies – though obviously beyond my scope here – can be traced to the entangled logics of state developmentalism, women's movement organising, and the compulsions to rely on bilateral development aid, especially with structural adjustment programmes from the 1990s. These national and transnational forces produced a coherent – and enduring – knowledge project when it came to knowing women/gender (and belatedly, sexuality). In especially attaching the women's question to ambitions around development and modernisation, such a knowledge project normalised certain ways of knowing women – quantitative, policy-oriented or applied social science – while marginalising others – especially "humanistic approaches to the study of women". Mitra arrives at these conclusions by studying an archive of "the status of women" reports, across Asia and Africa, which also foreshadowed much of what was to come, when it came to researching gender in the global South: "by the 1990s, the status of women report dominated a vast knowledge industry on "women in development", an ever-expanding domain of state-sponsored research, and policymaking conducted by thousands of researchers and institutionalised by local women's groups, NGOs, national governments, and international organisations and foundations".

African feminists have been especially attuned to the implications, both material and epistemic, of this yoking of gender research to the women in development (WID) paradigm. With origins in the 1970s – and robustly criticised since – WID, with its assumptions around African underdevelopment, patriarchy, and African women, continues to exercise the imagination of important publics, namely states and international donors. It equally informs graduate research, university curricula, workshops and conferences, besides policy-making and advocacy around women's rights. The hegemony of the paradigm not only drives the production and prioritisation of applied and highly practical knowledge, but also prescribes what knowledge and objective truth is– that which is of "relevance" to African women's development (Lewis 2005). Lewis builds on existing analyses and critiques by African feminists (see especially Mama) to show how a pervasive developmentalism, enabled by conservative postcolonial states and neoliberal market reforms, severely limits more expansive epistemic horizons. The many consequences include: an instrumentalization of gender research toward narrow (technocratic) agendas and interests; forms of depoliticization and deradicalization (and even a break with earlier links between women's studies and

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women's movements); an essentialising of "woman" as a stable category/subject of knowledge; the prioritisation of certain "safe" areas of investigation/intervention – sexuality as it pertains to reproductive health and population control – and the marginalisation of others – sexual orientation and same-sex desire; and the foreclosure not only of more theoretically attuned, critical or innovative thought, but of knowledge which would in fact respond to the challenges faced by African women (Connell; Lewis, Mitra; Tamale; McFadden, etc). Another kind of mono academic/epistemic culture is thus willed into existence – one which is not hospitable to theory/theorising, in the "belief that African and other third-world and socially engaged feminists should concern themselves only with 'bread-and-butter' issues" (Lewis?). Even as feminist scholars have offered alternative, critical and radical epistemologies of gender, Lewis shows the persistence of such "conservative traditions" that "obstruct progress in African gender research and advocacy". Writing almost two decades later, Tamale observes similar trends in gender research, notwithstanding the greater institutionalisation of women's studies in African countries in more recent years:

"… although some GWS research around the continent is well entrenched, a lot of it "remains technocratic and narrowly developmentalist," feeding into and fed by a neoliberal ideology; most are partitioned into disciplinary silos organized along the lines of "gender and —"; there are efforts to establish transnational links between the sites but such efforts are still tenuous and further hindered by language blocs; and finally, most are delinked from civil society and community activism".

International development played a direct role in the establishment of women's studies in Uganda; the catalytic event being the Third UN Women's conference in Nairobi in 1985. It was at this conference that the ground was laid for the eventual establishment of the department of women's studies at Makerere University (the first of its kind in Uganda and in East Africa and one of the oldest programs on the continent; see Ernstberger; Mwaka; Ssewakiryanga). For its early emergence and eventual institutionalisation, women's studies at Makerere was directly dependent on international donors – DFID, and Swedish and Danish agencies – and state support. The ultimate establishment of women's studies thus reflected the needs and concerns of these key patrons. Mwaka, the inaugural chair of department of women's studies at Makerere, tells us how early proposals pitching for women's studies included commitments to producing staff for NGOs and for the Ministry of Gender and Community Development; both areas which were short of expertise and trained personnel in women's studies (457). This is indeed what the program did when it was first set up, in the early 90s, in ways that also mediated its research and pedagogy: the curriculum was "women-development"-based (Erstberger 10) and research was directed "to provide reference material for development agencies, donors, researchers, and NGOs within and outside Uganda" (460).

Even as Mwaka's reflections are from 1996, Ernstberger observes, in an article published in 2020, similar trends. If anything, NGOs appear to have come to play a greater role in determining the field of feminist knowledge production, not least through the promise of providing employment to those graduating with degrees in women's studies.[16] Some of the postgraduate students that Ernstberger spoke to saw in women's studies the potential of a stable secure job in the public or non-profit sector; they also actively eschewed labels of

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[16] Similar trends have been observed in post-liberalised India, besides the co-option of feminist research by NGOs and processes of NGOisation (see Sinha Roy 2014 and Roy 2009).

"feminism" (the replacement of women's studies with gender studies was also about marketability and employability; see Lewis).

Given these entrenched traditions of development-driven or donor-funded research that continue to haunt African (and Indian) public institutions, our South-South collaboration envisioned the materialisation of different epistemic possibilities (for Southern academics to become producers as opposed to mere consumers of knowledge, in Tamale's terms). It emphasised theorising, over simple and simplistic data collection, and offered concrete ways to achieve the same, in the offer of time – away from teaching and service – for faculty to write; in possibilities to think collectively and collaboratively; in prioritising marginalised areas (like sexuality); and supporting graduate research. But well into the project – after a full two years – it was obvious that our women's studies partner in Uganda was far from responsive to its intellectual remit. Staff responded either in silence or asked us what to research. While speculative, given that this collaboration failed to even take off, my sense is that staff were more comfortable with collaborating with knowledge projects that spoke more directly to existing research, pedagogies and publics, than did ours.

Our partner's public website suggested that the bulk of research, whether being undertaken individually or collaboratively (and funded externally or internally), was of a highly applied and empirical nature, around familiar themes like, health, population, economic development, and even "national transformation". The teaching program of the department also clearly echoed WID and GAD logics, offering undergraduate and graduate courses – and even trainings and diplomas – in gender and development, envisioned as directly "capacitating" local government, various ministries, and community development leaders. Indeed, the website and associated publicity material of the department was littered with a familiar developmentalist language – of community development, training, capacity building, sensitisation, planning and monitoring, economic empowerment, and gender mainstreaming. It's public profile, at least, showcased an epistemic orientation toward meeting the needs for the (trans/national and highly local) development machinery. It was not surprising, then, that much of the funded research they were undertaking was around HIV/Aids, and later, Covid.[17] These large-scale, multi-player projects would obviously provide greater and more lasting forms of capital and resources than what we might have offered, as a relatively smaller-scale, humanities-driven, and primarily scholarly-oriented research project. The department was headed by a female scholar, trained in the UK, with expertise in health sciences and systems (with many staff members having a similar profile).

If we turn, further, to a historic international conference on gender that the department hosted – at the end of our collaboration – we see even more clearly the epistemic assumptions, habits and orientations at work. Like the "flagship" seminar series that our Indian partner hosted online, this large-scale, three-day, hybrid conference is a good indicator of the constitution of local knowledge and publics, especially as it was meant to act as a timely review of gender studies in Africa. Showcasing nearly 500 abstracts from mostly African scholars/researchers from the continent and some from the diaspora (available online, alongside the programme), the conference shows the enduring impact of colonial epistemologies – of anthropology and economic development, in particular – in shaping scholarly and public discourse on gender in

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[17] I do not know enough about the immediate institutional contexts or even pressures that might have informed these choices, but I do know that this case was not exceptional. We interacted with researchers in Mozambique who had little time to give to our project, given the considerable demands on their labour and time from donor-driven projects/paid consultancies.

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Africa. Abstracts proposing to study African religious and cultural practices, customary laws, and nuptial rituals (for their impact on women/gender relations) sit alongside those seeking to support women's empowerment – in line with sustainable development goals –in areas like health, violence against women, development, agriculture, and so on. The book of abstracts constitutes, in fact, a test case of some of Lewis' critical observations – suggestive of epistemological trends that are highly applied, empirical and positivist, on the one hand, or culturalist and nativist, on the other.[18] Seemingly committed to mapping the social – primarily through the establishment of casual relations between social phenomenon (gender and voters' choices, or links between climate change and sustainable development, for instance) – they presume a pre-existing stable subject ("woman") and appear geared toward clear policy imperatives and outcomes (how can ICTs empower African women; the usefulness of a legal framework to tackle GBV, etc). It goes without saying that most abstracts were of a social science bent, with few representing traditional humanities disciplines, like philosophy or history (there was little evidence of inter- or transdisciplinary scholarship, even as it is hard to assess from an abstract alone). Papers proposed also appeared to draw on research overwhelmingly undertaken within the rubric of the nation-state, be it Uganda, Nigeria or South Africa. Notwithstanding robust regional networks for gender research on the continent (see Lewis), this conference articulated with a methodological nationalism that is common to Northern logics and institutional sites around area studies and "'native' subjects of research" (Hundle). In writing about the limits of Ugandan feminist scholarship, Hundle draws attention to both a methodological nationalism and what she calls "postcolonial patriarchal nativism", that together:

"limits its subjects of study to indigenous Ugandan women and excludes Indian women. In doing so, it avoids the possibilities of analysing women's experiences of heteropatriarchal violence relationally, thereby reproducing nativist nationalist tendencies. In addition, unlike in South Africa, intersectional feminist frameworks for understanding multiple race-, class-, gender-, religious-, community- and caste-based oppressions may exist in East Africa, but they have yet to be more fully incorporated into feminist research methodologies and scholarly analyses".

If the women's studies department that we partnered with seemed inhospitable to theory-making and to the transnational, then this was not true of the entire institution. On the contrary, the university housed a globally well-known research centre – one of the few on the continent – that trafficked in and even produced high theory, with many Northern-trained scholars who circulated in Northern and Southern academic and publishing spaces alike and were well versed in a range of epistemic traditions (it is worth noting that our only successful collaboration with the university took place with an individual scholar and a student located here). The centre described its mandate in contrast to growing cultures of consultancy and developmentalism in higher education, epitomised by other departments in the very same institution.

To put it differently, the same Southern institution provided a range of services of differing and differential value: raw data which would be typically provided by researchers and field

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[18] Alongside this "technocratic and narrowly developmentalism" bent of gender research – that is prevalent on the continent to this day – Lewis shows the influence of a colonial anthropological imagination on gender research. Traditional anthropological research produces a relentless focus on African "difference" and "culture", to establish ahistorical and unchanging divides between the west and Africa (while downplaying, for instance, structural inequalities between men and women in African communities).

staff, who would also work as consultants and gender trainers in the development industry, for the consumption of state and bilateral aid agencies, and a high value commodity, like theory, that can be consumed globally, because of its legibility to – its epistemic status – in the North. In this way, the research centre was comparable to our Indian partner, who employed white queer theorists – and the performance of US theory– to accrue for itself forms of symbolic capital, credibility and public visibility. Its collaboration with a South African University brought capital and resources but not legitimacy or status. And while our African partner was happy to provide data or evidence, it did not see this "product" or "service" as commensurate with what was being asked – theory-making in the South (it also clearly attracted larger funds and resources from elsewhere). Whether they produced data or theory, our partners participated in a shared dynamic of consolidating long-established patterns of knowledge production and consumption – of consolidating global knowledge asymmetries and the coloniality of global value chains. The North is deeply implicated in these dynamics, material and epistemic, or in "actively unlearning the South" (Santos in Bhambra 103).

Conclusion: nobody said it would be easy

Notwithstanding generous amounts of time and resources – and even minimal expectations around publication or "outputs" – this research collaboration failed to provide meaningful and reciprocal intellectual exchange, especially amongst those *within* the South. The failures of this collaboration are its own. My collaborators will no doubt have their own explanations for it (and experiences of it). They might even suggest that the collaboration did not in fact feel hospitable to them – it did not make room for their needs, voices, desires or ambitions. This is not surprising. Research collaborations tend to emerge out of and align closely with the temporalities and demands of the neoliberal university – they have little time and space to adequately come into its own or to develop organically. Our choices of partners were at least in part rooted in convenience. A private university was easier to partner with than a public one in India, while an existing memorandum of understanding and prior collaborations with the Ugandan institution made it an obvious choice. My own location in this project, as PI, was also a convenient one. As an Indian (passport holder), living and working in a global South institution in South Africa (with considerable Northern links and connections), I was an ideal native to lead this project. As someone invested in explicitly transnational feminist goals, for scholarship and community, I also operated with biases and desires. I also held the purse strings of a rich Northern grant, in ways that afforded me distinct forms of advantages and power.

But choices rooted in convenience – whether bureaucratic, locational, subjective or otherwise – are rarely sites for the flourishing of genuine solidarity, reciprocity, and exchange. These were at least the minimal assumptions and expectations that I made and carried. But they echo wider ("sticky") ones around the "South-South" – and of the links and connections "among ourselves" – as being intrinsically positive, even liberatory, given their status as remedy to the pitfalls of Northern-driven epistemic projects. South-South exchanges act to diagnose and counter "the imperialist-colonialist basis of North-South interactions", writes Batra, for instance, in a typical fashion. Remedial logics are known to have their limits, however (Liu; Nash). In this instance, they effectively elided – even obscured – the lack of equality or equivalence, as opposed to intimacy, symmetry or commensurability, within the global South. Against easy celebrations of Southern exchanges and romanticised visions of Afro-Asian feminist solidarity, the "South-South" emerged a terrain of dissonant intimacies,

not merely infused with nativist and nationalist biases when it came to feminist scholarship (Hundle), but also with forms of epistemic coloniality.[19]

The absence of western institutions and players – or what might amount to dewesternisation in Mignolo's terms – did not amount to anything straightforwardly decolonial in practice.[20] On the contrary, the asymmetries amongst the institutional players on the project – and broader Southern asymmetries – played out in recognisably colonial ways, stabilising, moreover, a global division of knowledge production in which theory-making is the custodian of the North, for which raw data is provided by the South. In this global supply chain, actors were differently, unevenly and unequally positioned, even as they were all located in the global South. Some provided, in ways that southern locales have always meant to, raw data for feeding the theory mills of the North, while others transformed data into globally legible (queer) theory, by virtue of their proximity to and performance of US theory speak. The Indian partner repositioned itself from being a site of difference to one of similarly with the North but in ways that ensured that the Northerness of theory was maintained and that an overarching division of epistemic labour remained undisrupted (to paraphrase Connell – Bhambra 99). Embodying another kind of hierarchy *within* the South, the epistemic status of "Africa" as providing gender data and not theory was also maintained rather than disrupted.

Ultimately, if we return to RMF/FMF, we see clearly that the modalities of decolonial disruption cannot emanate from conceptual or even institutional imperatives, from above, however well-resourced or well-intentioned. Mahvish Ahmed reminds us of the failure of academic discussions to engage southern social movement texts as the sites of decolonial praxis and counter-hegemonic knowledge production. She joins those decolonial scholars who push against academic tendencies to reduce decolonisation to mere metaphor, in precisely the forms of canonisation and co-option that Cusicanqui identifies. Instead, Ahmed says:

"Decolonial theorists – from outside disciplinary sociology – have been more insistent on centring the worlds of colonised subjects and the knowledge of their movements, and in many ways this article builds on their work. Perhaps that is why student movements, more than institutional academics, were central to placing decolonisation at the centre of university agendas".

Indeed, the transformations that took place not just to institutions of higher education but to South African society would not have happened without the unprecedented, even violent rupture wrought by student activists on university campuses. When I first arrived at Wits, just before these movements broke, US-based scholars – from decolonial theorists like Mignolo

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[19] Ultimately, the North-South paradigm might well be the culprit, insofar as it also obscures internal asymmetries. Prathama Banerjee argues that even as it hopes to liberate us from Eurocentrism, the term, the Global South can result in a flattening of diverse, shifting and overlapping thought-regions, as she calls it. She insists on using the term as "a placeholder, even though I realize that there is really nothing called the global South and, indeed, there never was". But see also Ahmed's more recent insistence to think about the global South as geography, and not just epistemology alone.

[20] These observations echo Mignolo's thesis on dewesternisation and decolonisation, which are not always coeval processes.

and Torres to Judith Butler– were regular presences on campus. I often joked that I encountered more celebrity academics when I moved from the North to the South. In the afterlife of the movements, African scholars became far more visible on platforms that were previously dominated by white Western academics. This shift was merely one way of recognising the epistemic status of African knowledge and of responding to student demands for an overhaul of the institutional sites and epistemes of higher education (in favour of what Sarah Nuttall has called a redistributed university). A greater hospitality to African – and minor or subordinated – knowledge forms is ultimately in aid of the kind of radical hospitality that Mbembe envisions; such that the African student feels like the university is a space to which they are entitled to belong; that they might say, "This is my home. I am not a foreigner. I belong here" (Mbembe).

To be sure, these movements failed – at least, in their primary goal of ensuring free, decolonial higher education for all South Africans. But failure chartered an alternative path. Exposing the limits of post-Apartheid "transformatory" institutional practices as well as their coloniality and inhospitality to the black African, failure served "as the launching pad for alternatives precisely when the university cannot" (Halberstam 2011). The failures of a South-South collaboration – to effect, in particular, "non-colonizing South-South dialogues" – caution, at the very least, against any simplistic celebration of South-South connections as being intrinsically decolonising, especially outside of or delinked from social movements, and as taking place without a reconfiguration – a redistribution – of an asymmetrical global knowledge system (in which the African is an afterthought). Failure raises the stakes – it demands a more demanding relation to decolonisation – by showing that the universities of the South are not straightforwardly hospitable to decolonial thinking and practice, or that achieving decolonial aspirations here too will not be met without frustration or struggle (complicating a bad North and good South binary). It reveals liberatory pedagogies that are feminist and queer to be hospitable to the reproduction rather than the disruption of coloniality, whether out of compulsion or choice. And finally, that the "South-South" cannot constitute remedy without reconfiguration. Recognising these tensions and limits is not hard, but chartering what is to be done is harder. Nobody said it would be easy.