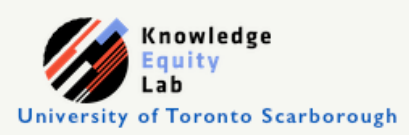


UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education



Regional Report: Open Science & the Decolonization of Knowledge International Webinar Series

EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA (ENGLISH)

27 November 2020

Organised by:

Canadian Commission for UNESCO and UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education

Supported by:

The Knowledge Equity Lab, University of Toronto Scarborough

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UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education

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WEBINAR DETAILS

Webinar Title: Open Science & the Decolonization of Knowledge: Europe and North America

Date: Friday, November 20, 2020

Time: 9 a.m. PT / 12 p.m. ET / 5 p.m. GMT

Participants registered: 350 people

Participants attended: 170 people

The webinar was scheduled for 90 minutes, but it was extended to 120 minutes on the day of due to the high engagements from participants during the question and answer portion.

WEBINAR AGENDA

Moderator:

Dr. Leslie Chan, associate professor, University of Toronto Scarborough, Canada

Rapporteur:

Ms. Suriani Dzulkifli, Knowledge for Change Consortium programme manager, UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education and PhD candidate, University of Victoria

Welcome remarks (5 min):

Ms. Ellie Haine-Bennett, Natural Sciences programme officer, Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO)

Message from one of the authors (5 min): Dr. Leslie Chan

Speakers (15 min each):

Dr. Romina Istratii, senior teaching fellow, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK

Dr. Jude Fransman, research fellow, Open University, UK and co-convener, Rethinking Research Collaboration

Ms. Angela Okune, PhD candidate, University of California Irvine, USA

Closing remarks (5 min):

Dr. Leslie Chan

Questions and answers with participants (originally 30 minutes but extended to 60 minutes)

SPEAKERS' PRESENTATIONS

Welcome remarks: Ms. Ellie Haine-Bennett, Canadian Commission for UNESCO

- Speaker started by acknowledging that she was giving remarks from the unceded territory of the Algonquin people
- Speaker highlighted that:
 - as a specialised agency of the United Nations, UNESCO plays an important role in setting standards and norms especially those related to the protection of information and all forms of rights of cultural and heritage.
 - UNESCO is currently working towards a new recommendation on Open Science. Once the international standards are set up, and UNESCO will invite member states to take legislative or other steps to apply these principles and norms at a national level.
 - UNESCO is currently taking online consultations which will be used to provide feedback by the end of this year on the first draft of the recommendation.
 - the second draft will be produced in March 2021 which will be debated by member states to produce a final text for the recommendation that will be presented and approved at the General Conference in November 2021.
 - it was important that this recommendation contributed to the ethics of decolonising knowledge and to reflect diverse knowledge systems including the views and experiences of the Indigenous peoples, minorities and approaches from the Global South.
 - CCUNESCO was happy to work with allies and leaders including the authors of the paper.
 - today's events would be discussing the paper as an effort to influence UNESCO recommendation to ensure that Science was a practice with and for the communities.

Message from one of the authors: Dr. Leslie Chan, University of Toronto Scarborough, Canada

- Speaker who was also the moderator mentioned the success of the recent World Virtual Indigenous Circle, where Indigenous elders and scholars from around the world shared the views of Science and the decolonisation of knowledge, and encouraged attendees to watch the recording of the Circle, which would be posted on the CCUNESCO Youtube.
- He emphasised on the need to question the existing structures of knowledge systems and how to challenge these existing barriers, but more importantly how to reimagine and to think about redesigning some of these knowledge systems.
- He mentioned that he too was guilty of being pessimistic and critical of these existing 'legacy' systems, thinking there hadn't been much changes after years of working in academia, but seeing young scholars today reminded him that there would be generations of researchers and scholars to continue the work and make a difference, and this was what today was all about.

- He mentioned that today was an invitation to all to imagine the world differently, the different possibilities that call for the different kind of thinking about how we would work and collaborate together, about open infrastructures and how we would really allow our imaginations to drive these changes rather than to try to fit in the boxes that funders demanded us to comply.
- He reiterated that he wants to join this world of possibility and leave the depressing part of fitting in a box to conform funders' demands behind.

First speaker: Dr. Romina Istratii, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, UK

Title of presentation: Moving towards an Open Access decolonial knowledge production model: The need for a systemic, people-centered approach

- Speaker started by positioning herself that she had about a decade of experience in trying to decolonise the epistemology in gender, religion and development studies, working primarily with communities in Sub-Saharan Africa. She considered herself a practitioner and a researcher, not an academic.
- The presentation was guided by three questions:
 - What does the current knowledge production system look like?
 - How do shifts to Open Access and the decolonisation movements affect this system?
 - What else needs to be done and what might be effective approaches?

1. What does the current system look like?

- Speaker highlighted that:
 - main problem was the disconnect between scholarship and lived experiences, and from her experience coming from a low-income family in Eastern Europe, this contributed to a two-tier knowledge system – non-experts or members of the public typically have access to less rigorous information compared to the privileged scholars.
 - dominance of English language was another problem. Language and epistemology are interlinked, which influences the standard of theorising and what is valid knowledge, not just terminologies, and this can be seen in citation politics, peer review norms, forms of knowledge production and sharing.
 - political, ideological and regulatory framework such as the Research Excellence Framework in the UK contributed to a competition-based model among institutions and academics which had been a problematic trend.
 - funding asymmetries also contributed to this complex multi-dimensional system as funders' priorities on what was 'excellent research' and what should be funded were primarily informed by northern standards since funders were mostly based in the Global North.

- geographic distribution of publishers was also problematic. Western euro-centric publishing module, citation, indexing, etc. were designed so that Global North research were favoured, intentionally or unintentionally.
2. How do shifts to Open Access and the decolonisation movements affect this system?
- Speaker highlighted that:
 - multiple stakeholders and communities had been involved in this effort in recent years including SOAS. Important to acknowledge this since they've had contributed to changing the system, but also left some unaddressed gaps.
 - there had been organised efforts to decolonise knowledge production through a more substantive engagement of non-western, Indigenous, female and other marginalised voices. She saw it as very salient currently in higher education.
 - processes that universities followed when they established partnerships and international research projects with Global South partners had historically been informed by the regulatory framework in the northern societies and had considered less the cultural and legal frameworks, and the capacity needs of local partners. In recent years, there had been an increased awareness addressing these inequalities, through reflexive and dialogical research collaborations. Funders were more aware, and had been keen to include Global South researchers in peer review of funding proposals especially when they took place in local societies.
 - there had been new publishing initiatives to promote Open Access and knowledge that was immediately accessible, and the diversification of publishing formats such as films, poetry, ethnographic notes. A shift to think different of what knowledge was, and how to accommodate different forms of knowledge in an institutionalised context.
 - there had also been efforts to promote Indigenous languages and to connect knowledge production to communities, as a way to ensure that knowledge was relevant to real communities and people.
 - while there had been positive efforts as mentioned, and her currently being based at SOAS, travelling the world, and being exposed to multiple realities, there was still a need to better engage with the non-English world.
 - the language of Science remained largely English, although publishing in Spanish was slowly becoming popular primarily because of salient Iberoamerican journals.
 - her main concern was the shift to Open Access publishing, despite being presented as a panacea of evenness, it was still an initiative that started in Western Europe, primarily informed by the 'hard' Science, not necessarily Social Science and Humanities. It seemed to her that it had become another publishing business model for large publishers to continue their profit-seeking practices and capitalistic behaviours.
 - scholarship being considered the preserver of academia was problematic when thinking of the future and the retention of knowledge, despite efforts to bridge rigorous research with society and real communities. Economic inequalities played a role because it was harder for those at the margins, speaking from her

experience coming from a low-income family. She pointed out that it was harder for them to make it in the system since they didn't have the capital, a system that favoured western Eurocentric standards.

3. What else needs to be done and what might be effective approaches?

- Speaker shared:
 - her initiative called the Colonial Subversion as a response to these asymmetries, where it is free, accepts multiple forms of publishing and encourages contributors to submit their contributions in their native languages.
 - that however many still chose to publish in English because their own universities, and the environment that they compete in valued English more. That meant that we must support them more in producing rigorous publication.
 - that Scientific knowledge and results were not immediately available even though they were published in Open Access virtually, so we must bridge knowledge production with local society if we were really aiming at the democratisation of Science. We needed to think how we could publish locally, in locally affordable prices and to make sure that knowledge was relevant, and translated in local languages if necessary.
 - that her experience so far as one of the editors and working with multiple members in 12 countries had taught her that to work effectively, she must adapt to their needs, as they came from different sectors and had different starting points, and it shouldn't be a transactional relationship.
 - we needed a more collegial attitude towards our Global South colleagues and an openness to learn from them and with them together.

Second speaker: Dr. Jude Fransman, Open University, UK and Rethinking Research Collaborative

Title of presentation: Open Science *within, with* and *outside* Academia: A systems-approach to the decolonisation of knowledge

- Speaker started by positioning herself as an academic based at the Open University in the UK but also inhabiting slightly inside and outside position, as she had been co-convening a network of networks, the Rethinking Research Collaborative, which worked transnationally across academia, civil societies, social movements, international NGOs and other research communities. She had also been working increasingly at the local level in her local community in North London, in deprived housing estates.
- Speaker highlighted that:
 - local and global approaches were important to this discussion of Open Science, and how could we move in local spaces and the different interpretations and manifestations of what the global was and who had been controlling it.
 - Global South was significantly underrepresented in terms of global research outputs by sharing a map of this, and acknowledged that this problem had been publicised and informed major funding drives especially in Europe and North America to encourage transnational collaborations in research.

- But despite this, they were often framed by agenda set in Europe and North America and in many cases, they might also exacerbate inequality by supporting 'elite' scientists or 'elite' universities, which would create more divide in the Global South.
- it was important to reimagine how the map might look if it included those who contributed to the research but might not necessarily be recognised as a co-author, or research published as an organisation/team instead of individual authors, or research as policy reports instead of peer review journals.
- these types of term could be used to justify leadership in high income context, as well as legitimating in itself, this broader system of matrix which presented itself as universally applicable, but served the interests of a particular type of Science in a particular context, and thus served a particular political ideological agenda that was less aligned with other regional interests.
- there was an urgent need to consider the implication to research that was fair and equitable and fit for purpose.
- there still were a few positives. The issue had been increasingly acknowledged by a wide range of individuals and organisations that played a role in establishing norms for research cultures. These initiatives representing the rallying around responsible research assessment movement in different forms, across different organisations and countries primarily in Europe and North America but also some organisations in Global South such as the Latin America Forum and Hong Kong Principles for Assessing Researchers.
- however, not all initiatives had led to transformation. She outlined that there had been different responses:
 - Cosmetic appropriation had been the recent inclusion of aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the impact measure in the Times Higher Education rankings (speaker acknowledged that this ranking was UK-based but influential worldwide), which paid lip service to societal impact framed through the SDGs, while arguably contributing to the exacerbation of the very inequality that the SDGs were supposed to respond to.
 - Calibrating machine was an example of the 'Research Excellence Framework', again from UK, which had broadened its scope to include a societal impact dimension and has tried to become more inclusive but essentially it was the same machine and system, just a little bit broadened.
 - Can openers such as highlighting debates, creating space for dialogues, coalition, but rarely institutional culture change across different networks. She mentioned that these were all British examples.
- what these types of initiatives didn't touch on so much was the notion of diversity of traditions of Science, the assume was that we were all working on the same idea of Science. There wasn't an explicit attention to the decolonisation of knowledge or situating of academia within the broaden ecosystem of knowledges. And there was the assumption that academia preserves the scientific knowledge.

- there were some examples of Science on numerous forms existing outside of 'mainstream' academia, working on Science and community-based approaches.
 - Different organisations: Rethinking Research Collaborative affiliations, UNESCO Chair CBR-SRHE K4C Consortium, international NGO spaces
 - There was a huge wealth of research outside of academic. The question was how did these big initiatives focus on enrolling a greater diversity of voice position knowledge into academic? Did it make sense to enrol in some kind of a globally representative way, or was it better to acknowledge these different preserves of knowledge and think a bit critically about how they interact?
- we must think about how we capitalise on the initiatives, the dialogue and momentum of the gathering within the formal academic Science and outside in this variety of spaces and if it was possible to bring these two things together?
- she proposed a framework whereby we think about Science itself as a system based on four interrelated dimensions:
 - **Agenda-setting:** who gets to decide what research is important? Which priorities should be funded? Similarly, the decision making around systems of peer review and evaluation of research
 - **Knowledge production:** the design and implementation of Science through different types of methodology and practices in different geopolitical spaces
 - **Communication:** which includes publication and patenting, and the uptake and adaptation of research output
 - **Use and impact:** learning, assessment and attribution, for example, who is recognised for this Science when processes are highly collaborative and long term extending over different research teams and contexts?
- she drew on the complexity theory, and thought about the basic tenets of complexity theory:
 - firstly, the idea of starting assumptions, inheritance of particular values or ideas about what research is governing, how these systems take form and continue
 - secondly, the idea of critical engagement with context and not just the context in which research is implemented
 - thirdly, the notion of difference in dialogue and to preserve autonomous spaces for excluded knowledges
 - finally and crucially, in the context of pandemic emergence, thinking about adaptation and how we're learning, responding and changing to these fast pace contexts and issues into new learning

Third speaker: Ms. Angela Okune, University of California Irvine, USA

Title of presentation: Open ethnographic archiving as feminist decolonial practice

- Speaker started by acknowledging that she was presenting from the unceded and ancestral land of the Ohlone people.
- Speaker highlighted:
 - two concepts – ‘situated openness’ and ‘inclusive research’
 - the high imbalance in regional representation in published academic work in the web of Science. This imbalance indicated how existing academic publishing infrastructures privileged certain regions and types of knowledge, but referring to the UNESCO paper, did Open Science help with the deeply entrenched inequality of knowledge production, and whose knowledge was valued? Or could it further exacerbate these already existing gaps?
 - the paper laid out that we were at a critical junction in this moment.
 - the Open and Collaborative Science in Development Network (OCSD net) where she worked from 2015 to 2018, a network of 26 countries from Latin America, Africa, Middle East, and Asia which includes scientists, development practitioners and community activists
 - studied how an open approach to Science could contribute to sustainable development
 - founded for many communities, ‘open’ was not always desirable. Among indigenous groups in South Africa, ‘openness’ was associated with colonial extraction of land and knowledge. Rural children and teachers in Kyrgyzstan were suspicious of open practices because of the country’s history of authoritarianism. In Argentina, social movement activists were scared of political prosecution, preferred to protect rather than share information.
 - that thus, openness had to be situated within particular political, social cultural and legal relations of possibility and inequality.
 - they built on work by postcolonial and feminist scholars on situated knowledges in order to articulate the context of situated openness.
 - Situated openness was recognising that openness was not universal, and it highlighted the importance of acknowledging how history, contexts, power relations and structural inequality condition all scientific production and sharing in a particular context.
 - OCSD net also found that many of the current tools and technology pushed as Open Science did not necessarily challenge the governing of the Science industry. But might in fact be re-entrenching power by creating new technical boundaries and requirements.
 - we needed to look at not only ‘who’ was doing the research work but also the structure of knowledge circulation.
 - situating openness was the first step. The next step was experimenting and sustaining new research systems that enabled meaningful change.
 - research infrastructure in this context referred to the social relations that produce and were produced by materials, which included research process, protocols, tools, norms, platforms, etc. that made up the research life cycle.

- the notion of inclusive research infrastructures took this broader understanding with an added focus on power dimensions.
- we must pay attention to the different power relations and perspectives rather than just having one universal ‘truth’
- her doctoral thesis of the ‘learning by doing’ approach to understand the challenges and opportunities of archiving and sharing ethnographic data understood opportunities.
 - For example, Platform for Experimental Collaborative Ethnography (PECE), had explicit values embedded in its design
 - Inspired by PECE, she came up with Research Data Share/RDS (ethnographic platform) and used herself to reconfigure herself with the topics of Open Data and her relationships with research participants. She took her own complicity and non-innocence in the structures of knowledge as a starting point to theorise how researchers might better navigate, organise, re-mix existing collection of data
 - This feminist conception of non-innocence was important to highlight because it meant that we started not from a point of easy critique, and a seeking for perfection. But rather by starting with the recognition that she was also very much entangled in the same systems that she was critiquing. Also situated her as a participant of her study.
 - RDS was used as an elicitation device but also a way of archiving her research data, giving the data back to the communities that she worked with
 - Beyond that, the RDS also served as open infrastructure to analyse and publish together. Individuals and groups in Kenya were interested in archiving and sharing ethnographic data.

Closing remarks: Dr. Leslie Chan

- Moderator thanked the other speakers for sharing their diverse experiences.
- Moderator emphasised that:
 - the ways to imagine possibilities and at this juncture it was important to think about what was possible.
 - this context was to help engage with the UNESCO process of drafting this global agreement or paper on Open Science. AND UNESCO having this particularly convening power would have some influence once it was decided by November 2021 on this paper that would describe what Open Science should look like normatively.
 - a concern was that the authors had made in clear in their paper was that they didn’t necessarily think it was a good idea to have one global standard with regards to Open Science, and how researchers define. This notion of one-size could apply to all was a problematic assumption, so the authors would like UNESCO to think about this situated openness, the kind of diversity and research impact of different situation, and the challenges that different community face in different contexts.

- ironically, earlier in April 2020, UNESCO announced that they would be working with Springer Nature, one of the biggest corporate international publishers, to publish the works of Open Access.
 - This greatly concerned him because if UNESCO was serious on decolonising the knowledge and taking the leadership in Open Science, they must question the relationship and support of these legacy institutions which were part of the structural problems to begin with.
 - He challenged UNESCO and UNESCO leadership to think about their relationship with these kinds of corporate publishers. In the meantime, there were thousands of publishers all around the world particularly in the Global South who were publishing important work but were not being recognised and supported.
 - As a result, some of his colleagues who had been calling for bibliodiversity were devastated by these kinds of monopolistic organisations.

DISCUSSION WITH PARTICIPANTS

THEME: BIBLIODIVERSITY

Question

One participant asked regarding bibliodiversity and how would we know what success looked like in terms of diverse readings, and if there were any support for educators out there?

Responses

Leslie mentioned in his teaching practices at the University of Toronto, students in his classes who were from all around the world brought to his attention that what they read did not reflect their lives, history, and experiences. He now invites students to share what they have been reading, their experiences from growing up so that their stories are also captured. He acknowledged that a lot of these materials were hard to access and that it was also important to work with the library and to question them for not getting the majority of the world's knowledge being the so-called 'best' library in the world. He emphasized that these joined conversations were important to have.

Romina agreed with Leslie. She highlighted that when thinking of decolonising, it was important to know what diversity means, and who defines that. This wouldn't be rhetorical when done reflectively and reflexively. She mentioned that when we started thinking of diversity, we could define it at multiple levels, for example, whom you cite, what you teach, the media of knowledge (e.g. acoustic visual), and you could use all sorts of media that we wouldn't consider 'academic' or 'mainstream'. She also mentioned there was also diversity in terms of narratives, even within national scholarship and narratives that there was competition. History was always told by the most powerful and politically empowered positions. There were multiple hidden

narratives even within national legacies and the local contexts. Thinking of diversity meant trying to uncover silent narratives and creating space of pluriversalism and multiversity.

THEME: UPLIFTING INDIGENOUS VOICES IN ACADEMIA

Question

Another participant stated that when we talk about decolonisation of knowledge, it also refers to the different Indigenous ways of knowing. In academia, one of the challenges that we face was valuing the different ways of understanding the world. He asked how have the speakers worked in Indigenous ways of knowing to be valued in academia, as people who were in the system or structure might not subsidise their own demise. He asked how have the speakers worked within or outside of the system in a way that we cherish and value Indigenous ways of knowing? He pointed out that the Indigenous peoples were not voiceless, but rather they were made silent, so how could we uplift these Indigenous voices of knowing?

Responses

Angela responded by saying that she wasn't sure if it should necessarily be on us (academics) to uplift those voices, often times we would have this sense of needing to fix things but she was unsure if that was the right approach. She said that sometimes not to intervene too much would be a better approach, and instead thinking infrastructurally to allow particular spaces for diverse knowledges. She added that looking at infrastructures that could both divide, hamper and restrict can also potentially open up and allow for plurality of knowledge.

Jude agreed with Angela. She gave an example that she attended an online event of Indigenous coders, and something that struck her was that most of these Indigenous coders mentioned they often had been token Indigenous voices at global events. She mentioned they were forced to be tokenistic at a global space, but since the pandemic, they were able to create online global spaces of multiple locals (including the event she was referring to), creating different ways of communicating, and bringing them together in their own terms.

Leslie highlighted that the tendency to include the mainstream would be the wrong way to go about it because homogenising into one system would be creating an inequality. He said that the whole idea was that we could live in multiple worlds of knowledge and ideas and freeing ourselves by seeing the different knowledge worlds and to take part in these different knowledge worlds. This was what the institutions were lacking, but communities were there to remind us. In fact, the communities were using their history and knowledge to enable them to live in this difficult time of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not the government trying to save them.

Leslie announced that the webinar was now officially over and thanked everyone again, but he would be staying on for as long as there were interests from participants to continue the discussion.

THEME: TROUBLING THE TERM 'SCIENCE' AND THE DISAPPROPRIATION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Question

A different participant mentioned that the disappropriation of the Indigenous knowledge was something that we needed to be upfront about, and that we needed to problematise what we meant by 'Science'. A lot of the things that we had been calling 'Science' had already disappropriated a lot of Indigenous knowledge which had been largely unremarked. She asked how could we push back? She recognised that academics were incentivised with this behaviour in academia, which had been part of the problem. She believed that there had to be an unpacking of the terminology especially Science.

Responses

Leslie responded that we should go back to the original meaning of Science, which were more expensive, as it referred to the systematic inquiry of our relationship with nature. He added that Indigenous people had always been doing Science, and agreed with the participant that Indigenous knowledge had been disappropriated for centuries and so this was one part of the decolonisation. He also added that we must change our institutional culture and go back to the leadership, since things were not going to change unless we had some brave leaders to think of the world differently.

Romina highlighted that was at the heart of the matter and Science in Greek was the word *epistími* from *epistito* which meant the lived surrounding, and how we understood our relationship to the world. People had different ways of understanding. She said that in her work, she was trying to understand how people understood gender related issues through their cultural and religious framework as these religious parameters were important in how they shaped people's behaviour. However, it was difficult because we were based in the enlightenment and post-enlightenment epistemology that had privileged a very distinct understanding of Science. She criticized the basic premise that considered universal theory-making told it in itself as it was all about universalising when knowledge was about nuancing, not universalising. She added that it was a systemic problem and we all have a responsibility to be reflexive as to not add to these problems.

Angela shared two resources, which was a book Reinventing Hoodia by Laura A. Foster and an Open Source software <https://mukurtu.org/>

Leslie shared a book Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer. He added that Indigenous knowledge and Science had always weaved together and how thinking differently of knowledge could allow us to think more openly about collaborations and be relational with the things that we would do rather than being extractive in the Western research traditions. He also agreed with Romina that we all have that responsibility.

Jude mentioned that she stepped back from academic recently and started to inhabit other research spaces in terms of local community-based activism and the global level in transnational networks. She said that she had the realisation that she could still engage with academia from the fringes and didn't have to necessarily go through all of the processes in order to be a researcher. She added that this scholar activism identity didn't have to mean that we had to be activists in nature, but this framing of research, knowledge and curiosity according to social global values and movements were positive, and once we've had the long term relationship based on trust and shared collective desire for action and change then we could frame our research to however conventional, rigorous or scientific within these broader kinds of struggle.

THEME: THE END OF DECOLONISATION

Question

Leslie read a question left on Menti meter, which was what would be next after decolonisation? Would decolonisation be the end goal?

Responses

Angela said that this was where our imagination needed to be put to work. She mentioned that according to Robin Kelley, anything we could imagine was not radical enough because it was already structured by the current systems that we lived in. She stated that we needed to really be practicing to imagine things differently and to develop that capacity.

One participant highlighted that decolonisation could not be an end goal because we could not end with colonisation, we must continue dealing with these same phases at the same time. He stated that the issue was to be able to find the good balance between our practice and what was good and what was not. If we decided to end with decolonisation, it meant that our work would also had an end and we couldn't end with something that we needed to deal with all the time.

Leslie agreed by saying that these were the kinds of struggle that we needed to engage with.

THEME: INCENTIVISATION SYSTEM IN ACADEMIA

Question

Another different participant wanted to know how could the incentivization system in academia be used to support the decolonisation of knowledge, if it were even appropriate to do so.

Responses

Leslie responded by saying that we were trapped in the colonial structure once we were in the matrix world, in terms of hierarchy, comparison, set of matrices for success, so even if it was an alternative matrix world, it still would be a part of this colonial thinking. He added that to get away, we must imagine our relationship with the world differently rather than one of domination over.

Romina responded by saying that if we wanted a genuine collaboration between the Global North and Global South in this institutional research framework, we needed to change the system, especially the funding structure because of its big parameter in research. She added that these structures were very much informed by UK foreign policies and aids and it would often go back to their political agenda as Jude spoke about. She also highlighted that performance had always been measured by high impact journals and the remedy to this was to reconceptualise how we measure performance and excellence, such as valuing work ethics, reflexivity, humility, the commitment to be relational in communities, and to have sustainable relationships with partners and the support and reciprocity. So, we must reconceptualise what we considered as valuable qualities and to find ways in the institutions to reword them, otherwise we would remain transactional as we were.

THEME: HUMAN RELATIONS IN RESEARCH - COLLECTIVE PAIN AND TRAUMA IN DISAPPROPRIATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE NEED FOR HUMILITY, FORGIVENESS AND COMPASSION

Question

One participant stated that there was no true threshold in the end of decolonisation, but there seemed to be a collective pain and trauma. We had been in a stage of accepting that knowledge have had produced and damaged, and it had been violent in the academic context. There had been despair in disappropriation of knowledge. The participant thought that we had to find value in being humble, and not be in the position of ego and just continue to take from Indigenous communities. Participant also mentioned that forgiveness was also important as there had to be a reparation for this harm, but the processes of forgiving were something that we had to do within ourselves. Otherwise how could we value our own contributions? How would we know what we wanted to share had value?

Responses

Leslie acknowledged that he had been in Canada for a few decades but only in last 20 years he had learned about the history of the Indigenous people in the country and what the government had done to the community over the years and those harms continue to exist. The whole notion of truth and reconciliation were only the beginning of addressing some of these harms and the notion of reconciliation was a difficult one for Indigenous communities because they mentioned without any conciliation, how could there be a reconciliation? He added that healing together was an important step, and the notion of decolonisation was not just about dismantling the systems but also about coming together, it was about conciliation too.

The participant added that they had been reflecting on compassion, and that exploring self-compassion and compassion to others would be something that could get us closer to understanding what humanity is. We must acknowledge that we were all humans, so why would someone do something so hurtful and damaging to someone else? The participant added the important process of slowing down in academia because it had been pushing people towards

wanting their ego and prestige to be something of importance in academia, but the participant asked how would we start talking about humility and compassion in the academic context? Each of us must do the process inwardly, and to find ways to forgive ourselves and others.

Leslie responded by saying that these kinds of discussions were so important but yet when we looked at the policy making, these discussions were completely lacking in terms for what Science was for and the human dimension of knowledge making. He questioned the point of producing knowledge if it weren't for the benefit of human and understanding each other.

THEME: THE NEED TO SLOW DOWN IN RESEARCH

Question

Another participant who self-identified that she was from the Inuit community shared that the people in her community had been experiencing researchers who were interested in the Inuit knowledge because of climate change, but there hadn't been a chance for them to take a step back to think about their future. She sought for speakers' advice or experience to share.

Responses

Romina responded by saying that this was a very challenging question she couldn't answer but had experience to share. She started working in the sub-Saharan Africa because the international development sector was representing gender relations, but always based on the Western theories. She wanted to create a space to listen to farmers' voice in different contexts. This made her realised that communities themselves lacked the space and opportunities to come together. So, we as researchers who have the privilege to create space must not turn it into a colonial and patronising space, and this was when reflexivity should come in again. Communities must be able to come together and use their own words, researchers must not impose certain terminology and words on them. She encouraged researchers to think of ways where they could facilitate these conversations, and be dialogical to converse with each other and have that exchange of opinions. Researchers mustn't rush to use certain concepts or words, but instead to listen. Be a student, not a teacher, not someone who 'knows'.

Leslie responded by sharing his experience of sitting in an Indigenous circle listening to a story, and four hours later, they were still listening to the same story. There was no rushing. He added that we were structured by neoliberal time where we would often rush, and funding had a time limit too. It would be important to slow down but also to refuse. He acknowledged that however it would be hard for people who were early in their careers to refuse. He mentioned that we should ask ourselves, 'Why are we doing this? Is it good for anybody? Who is it good for?' He thought that taking the time to reflect and refuse could be very important too.

The webinar ended with one participant sharing that they wanted to have a space where they could periodically meet and have these kinds of discussions with others as there had been value in coming together collectively and visibly. Leslie exchanged emails with the participant to create this dialogue.