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When good intentions aren't enough: Intersectional invisibilities in academia and the decolonial turn

Zusammenfassung

Wenn gute Vorsätze nicht ausreichen: intersektionale Unsichtbarkeiten und die *dekoloniale Wende* in der Wissenschaft

Die dekoloniale Wende hat nicht nur in der Geschlechterforschung, sondern in den Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften insgesamt Resonanz gefunden. Forschung und Lehre orientieren sich zunehmend an Dekolonisierung und intersektionalen Perspektiven. Dies verstehen wir nicht nur als intellektuelle Aufgabe, sondern als Aufruf zu transformativem Handeln mit greifbaren symbolischen und materiellen Konsequenzen. Unter Berücksichtigung transnationaler feministischer Diskurse untersucht dieser Artikel, was wir *in der Praxis* in einem institutionellen Kontext tun können, der Strukturen der Kolonialität und Invisibilisierung von anderweitigem Wissen in der akademischen Wissensproduktion fördert. Dies erfordert ein Verständnis marginalisierender Strukturen auf einer Metaebene *und* einen genauen Blick auf eine weniger beachtete Mikroebene: unsere eigene Rolle im Prozess der akademischen Wissensproduktion als Teil eines umfassenderen Rahmens dekolonialer Maßnahmen, welcher gemeinschaftliche Verantwortung und umfassende Partnerschaften voraussetzt.

Schlüsselwörter
Dekolonialer Feminismus, Feministische Epistemologie, Intersektionale Unsichtbarkeiten, Transnationaler Feminismus

Summary

The decolonial turn resonates not only in gender studies but across the humanities and arts. While research and teaching increasingly align with decolonization and intersectional perspectives, we understand this as more than intellectual tasks, rather as a call for transformative action with tangible symbolic and material consequences. Taking into account transnational feminist discourses, this article explores what we can do *in practice* in an institutional context that fosters structures of coloniality and invisibilization of knowledge *otherwise* in academic knowledge production. Addressing this issue requires an understanding of marginalizing structures on a meta-level *and* keeping an eye on a less observed micro-level: our own part in the process of academic knowledge production, understanding these dynamics as part of a broader interconnected framework of decolonial actions that emphasizes communal responsibility and comprehensive partnerships.

Keywords
decolonial feminism, feminist epistemology, intersectional invisibilities, transnational feminism

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1 Introduction

The decolonial turn has found resonance, not only in gender studies but across the humanities and arts. Decolonizing has many fronts; one is, of course, intellectual and immaterial. But it is not the only front. The colonization of different parts of the world had and, in many ways, continues to have genuine consequences for people: their bodies, their visibility or invisibility, their wallets, their health, and their overall existence. The decolonial project is not only about de-centering North-/Euro-/US-centric ways of knowing and methods of science; it is also about more rights, more justice, and a broader take on life in its plural shapes and forms. While research and teaching increasingly align themselves with the project of decolonization and intersectional perspectives, we understand this as more than intellectual tasks but as a call for transformative action with tangible symbolic and material consequences. Just invoking them as references is not enough. While reflecting on transnational feminist discourse, this article explores what we can do in practice in an institutional context that fosters structures of coloniality and invisibilization of knowledge *otherwise* within academic knowledge production. Tackling this issue involves an understanding of marginalizing structures on a meta-level *and* demands a close eye on a less observed micro-level: our own part in the process of academic knowledge production. By reflecting on decolonial theory that critically examines the intricate power dynamics and material conditions that shape this process, we aim to develop a nuanced understanding of decolonial praxis that challenges entrenched power relations within academia and beyond. Decolonizing academia is not a checklist item, but the invitation we would like to make is for a constant, permanent revision of how we do science – but not only science. Science and academia are inseparable from the inherently colonial socio-cultural contexts that shaped their emergence and rise. Consequently, institutionalized decolonization processes run the risk of devolving into static "speech acts" of good intentions with hollow criteria of "excellence," and it is our responsibility not to contribute to the commodification of decolonial and anti-racist thought (Kaplún 2005: 216ff.). Decolonization is a dynamic and ongoing process that involves both thinking and conduct, necessitating self-reflection of our relationships and taking responsibility for our roles as researchers and educators (Datta 2017). Commemorating 15 years of *GENDER*, we find it valuable to explore specific examples of critical contextual interventions (sections 4 and 5) which may resonate with your experiences and be adaptable to your context, building on the central arguments and sticking points in the current decolonial feminist discourse (sections 2 and 3) that underpin our reflections.

2 Gender research and the decolonial turn – A brief discussion of the current state

The decolonial turn in gender research represents a critical shift in perspective that challenges traditional Eurocentric (Amin 1988) and colonial frameworks. Building on the foundations of postcolonial transnational feminism (Spivak 1988; Mohanty/Russo/Torres 1991), it extends the critique beyond the political and economic dimensions to include epistemic, cultural, and ontological aspects, placing a strong emphasis on epistemic decol-

onization and broader integration of perspectives from the Global South. Coined by María Lugones in 2007, "decolonial feminism" has since become a growing movement entwining the analytical threads of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) and coloniality of power (Quijano 2000). This convergence emphasizes the intricate interweaving of gender, racism, and coloniality in the "modern/colonial gender system" (Lugones 2008: 78). Lugones describes this system as a hierarchically dualistic structured epistemic regime that divides the human from the non-human, generating social classification along race-gender categories. Consequently, this unified analytical framework constitutes a conceptual shift away from intersections. It recognizes that gender-related and racist oppression are not isolated but mutually influencing, highlighting that the structures and dynamics of modern societies are constructed upon colonial foundations (Espinosa Miñoso 2017: 150, 156). Therefore, when we engage with coloniality, we confront the persistent legacy of historical colonialism and the enduring influence of colonial thinking across global societies. This influence manifests in various forms, from disseminating ideas and power dynamics to cultural influences, economic interests, social hierarchies, and the very structures of our educational systems. Decolonization is an ongoing reflective process that formulates alternatives to hierarchical practices that produce invisibilities and non-existence(s). It requires cultivating decolonial thinking *and* conduct and is a contextual journey marked by learning from our mistakes and setbacks, involving both individual and collective effort. This entails disengaging from ingrained cognitive frameworks, demanding rigorous reflection and critical consideration of one's thought patterns and assumptions. However, the transformative trajectory of this process extends beyond *cognitive shifts*: it must manifest in substantive changes in *action* (Torres Heredia/Slezak 2022: 9; Global (De) Centre 2020). But what action exactly? And what are necessary cognitive shifts? How can we negotiate this on an equal footing? As the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective suggest (Stein et al. 2021: 4)[1], it is useful in this context, to differentiate between the *institutional* task of decolonization and the more profound effort of decolonization on personal and collective levels. Institutional efforts are restricted by strategic possibilities, while the deeper work of decolonization involves taking responsibility for personal growth and transformation, necessitating a commitment to approach tasks differently. As emphasized by Pitcher (2023: 102), the process of decolonization requires engaging in dialogue and opening one's research to perspectives from diverse fields, including those considered *outside* the academic realm. Hence, decolonization is closely intertwined with fostering multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary (research) practices. Inclusive, inviting, and open formats for such cooperation and exchange are essential aspects in this regard. While this insight is by no means new, recent studies (Griffiths 2022; Vienni Baptista 2021; Pereira 2019; Pavlidou 2011) indicate that academic practices continuously undermine the proclaimed ambition of academic institutions and fields to promote interdisciplinarity. Obstacles to such exchanges primarily result from limitations in time and resources within an exploitative academic environment, marked by "cultures of performativity" (Pereira 2017: 69) rather than a lack of interest and engagement. In addition to the challenges generally posed to interdisciplinary work, it is crucial to monitor the interplay between disci-

1 While it is customary only to name the first author followed by "et al." in case of publications by four or more authors, we consider this practice problematic and further invisibilizing, as explained in section 5.

plines, such as gender studies and others, ensuring *reciprocal* exchange and centering knowledge otherwise (Stein et al. 2021: 3). This requires feminist scholarship to reflect on its interrelationship with transregional and so-called "area studies" and increasingly engage with their theories, methods, and research findings instead of following an additive approach that merely incorporates "the other(s)" into a homogenizing framework (Shohat 2001: 1270). As highlighted by Duvisac (2022: 4) and Dhamoon (2015), feminist positions are *inherent in* decolonial theory, given its understanding of colonialism and coloniality as products of patriarchal structures. Important scholars and thinkers in this regard are Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso, Ochy Curiel, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Breny Mendoza, Ella Shohat, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, to name just a few. Nevertheless, the basic question remains: How can the justified criticism of the perpetuation of coloniality *in feminist knowledge production* through discourses claiming universality and scientific objectivity be reconciled with the commitment to fight against sexist and racial oppression? From a decolonial perspective, the idea that there is a single way to understand the world through reason and logic must be reconsidered. A "global decentering" or "southern attitude" (Global (De) Centre 2020; Ferreira/Pinheiro 2020) is essential – an ongoing commitment that transcends the concept of the universe to embrace the pluriverse, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of our world (Kiguwa 2019: 226f.). This resonates with the concept of "nonideal universalism" by Khader (2020), which defines opposition to gender-based oppression as a core commitment of feminism while detaching it from normative values (such as individualism, autonomy, and gender eliminativism) and a universalizing perspective on gender justice. For Khader, normative concepts within transnational feminist practice should aim to alleviate oppression rather than presuppose them as prerequisites for an idealized endpoint of gender justice. This perspective distinguishes between individual well-being and oppression (Khader 2020: 344ff.), helping to address transition costs (Khader 2019: 70ff., 131f.) in empowerment, considering diverse political strategies and moral vocabularies to approach gender-based oppression in different contexts effectively. However, as Espinosa Miñoso emphasizes, it remains questionable whether dismantling the universalism that underpins the construction of feminist unity can succeed unless complicity in colonial heritage and varying distributions of privilege are duly acknowledged and critically reflected upon within feminist scholarship and practice. She challenges the narrative of being "united in oppression" (Espinosa Miñoso 2017: 145) as to her, gender-based oppression is not to be separated from other "regimes of domination" (Espinosa Miñoso/Barros/Oliveira 2021: 114) that perpetuate hierarchies within feminism, sustaining privileges for those with racial and class advantages. Therefore, the conceptualization of an overarching agenda may not reflect the interest(s) of racialized, Black, and Indigenous feminists, as isolated struggles for privileges can give rise to new and intensified forms of oppression. Instead, she emphasizes the need to deconstruct the (modern) foundations perpetuating racism and capitalism within the matrix of oppression. Hence, only if feminism acknowledges its contemporary colonial roots and actively addresses the implicit racism within its liberation objectives can it significantly contribute to a collective effort to transform societies and enhance (individual) well-being. For transnational feminist practice to be genuinely transformative, it is contingent on addressing oppression and persisting white privilege *within* these categorized experiences (Espinosa Miñoso/Barros/Oliveira 2021: 112, 114f.). That entails sincerely confronting

uncomfortable points of rupture and taking responsibility (Datta 2018: 1f.). Now, what do we mean by sincerely? We trust the upcoming sections will provide clarity.

3 Shifting from transcendence to transformation: Cultivating a decolonial attitude

It is worth noting that while the dedication to opposing coloniality has certainly had an impact, opposing something does not per se imply a position of detachment, or as Sara Ahmed puts it, "transcendence" (Ahmed 2004: 6). Rather, it means being intimately connected to that which one opposes. "The messy work of 'againstness' might even help remind us that the work of critique does not mean the transcendence of the object of our critique; indeed, critique might even be dependent on non-transcendence" (Ahmed 2004: 6). Whereas Ahmed's analysis centers on what she calls the "non-performativity of anti-racism", we contend that the same principle applies to decolonization claims. Exactly because of this connectedness, we argue that an intimate engagement with the internalized colonial legacies that are deeply rooted in our institutions and our knowledge and that we aim to confront, dismantle, and transform should be at the core of decolonization. Possessing an intellectual understanding of the detrimental impacts of colonization alone does not automatically manifest as a decolonial mindset or alignment (Stein et al. 2021: 7). For this reason, decolonization requires more than mere acknowledgment. It also requires a willingness to address unpleasant entanglements and break down taboos, as opposed to an ostensibly smooth transition to decoloniality that enables one to concede the disadvantage of marginalized "others" without having to delve deeper into one's own overprivileged positions (McIntosh 2010 [1989]: 10). However, as numerous studies (Stein et al. 2021: 3, 7ff.; Ahmed 2006; Datta 2018; Voss 2016: 99f.) indicate, the latter remains general practice. This is because the open attribution of privileges commonly elicits defensiveness, which in turn favors the use of decoloniality as a contentless predicate for progressivism and modernity and consequently hinders effective moves toward decolonial transformation. Therefore, the common discourse in the context of decolonization usually oscillates between assigning blame and tiptoeing around the harmful effects of coloniality to reaffirm the "dedicated privileged", keeping them in their comfort zone (Stein et al. 2021: 3, 7). In our view, the essence of decolonization lies in cultivating ethical research *practices* that actively "engage the colonial legacy in the cause of social justice" (Pitcher 2023: 100). To work towards this goal requires, firstly, raising awareness of the *symbolic* and *material implications* of privilege distribution within colonized structures, followed by proactive practices. In this context, Stein et al. (2021: 7) highlight two vital dimensions of engagement: (1) *affective work*, which entails acknowledging, analyzing, and assuming responsibility for navigating displeasing, embodied, and emotional reactions that surface in the context of uncertain and conflicted decolonization endeavors; and (2) *relational work*, directed towards the restoration of strained relationships by giving primary importance to the nurturing of respect, trust, consent and mutuality, instead of presupposed (final) transactional results. Both forms of engagement underscore that the advocacy for proactive practices does not align with a one-size-fits-all approach or an immediate epistemolo-

gical purge. Instead, they point to commitment and empathy as fundamental attitudes, and this aspect seems central to us. We understand this as a transformational path that focuses on developing alternative approaches and modes of interaction that challenge existing norms. The change in outlook is fundamental. Decoloniality should not be viewed as a symbol of transcendence or a commitment to being something; it should manifest in concrete actions. It is an option rather than a rigid regulatory canon, encouraging a self-critical perspective on how we perpetuate power relations as institutions *and* "dividuals" (Ott 2015), as we will outline next in sections 4 and 5.

4 Integrating decolonial practices in academia: Examples and case studies

To genuinely engage in decolonial practices, academic institutions must adopt community-focused strategies that emphasize structural changes. Frameworks like *Ubuntu* and *Buen Vivir* provide valuable insights for these transformations. *Ubuntu*, a Nguni Bantu term meaning "I am because we are", promotes communal interdependence and shared humanity, challenging the individualistic approach prevalent in Western academia. Implementing *Ubuntu* involves collaborative research initiatives that prioritize community needs and knowledge systems, directly benefiting local communities (Ngubane/Makua 2021). Similarly, *Buen Vivir*, or *Sumak Kawsay* in Kichwa, Indigenous Andean concepts meaning "good living", emphasize harmonious coexistence within communities and with nature, advocating for a holistic approach to well-being, including environmental sustainability and social equity. Integrating *Buen Vivir* into academic practices involves developing curricula that incorporate Indigenous knowledge and ecological perspectives, encouraging research projects addressing local environmental challenges, and promoting policies for equitable distribution of academic resources. Ecuadorian universities, for example, have successfully embedded these principles within their academic frameworks, particularly in social work education. They create partnerships with local Indigenous communities to co-develop research projects addressing pressing social and ecological issues, ensuring that academic outputs are both intellectually rigorous and socially impactful. Social work programs train students to work collaboratively with Indigenous communities, utilizing decolonial methodologies such as participatory action research. This integration makes research relevant and beneficial to marginalized communities, prioritizing local knowledge and needs (Pazmay Pazmay 2017). Also, *Harambee*, meaning "all pull together" in Swahili, is recognized and applied in academic settings, particularly in African universities focused on community development and cooperative action (Corrado 2022). For instance, in Kenya, universities actively embrace *Harambee* principles by promoting collaborative projects and educational exchanges with international organizations and other institutions to address social issues through unified efforts (see, e. g., Strathmore University 2023). To foster a decolonial ethos, academia needs structural reform. This means revising hiring practices, creating platforms for marginalized voices, and establishing policies that recognize activists and marginalized groups. Mentorship programs for underrepresented students and scholars are also crucial. By integrating these practices, academia can contribute to social jus-

tice movements and create more equitable environments. Universities play a significant role in supporting movements against environmental destruction. They can partner with grassroots organizations and Indigenous communities to combat resource exploitation and protect biodiversity. For instance, collaborations in the Amazon Basin involve academics conducting research on the ecological impacts of deforestation, documenting Indigenous ecological knowledge, and advocating for stronger environmental protections (Merino 2021). Universities can also provide platforms for Indigenous activists to share their experiences and mobilize support, amplifying their voices in the global environmental movement. Additionally, science can aid struggles for Indigenous land rights and global movements against femicides by providing evidence-based research, raising awareness, collaborating with affected communities, advising policymakers, and offering technological support. It can help protect democratic social self-organization from military attacks by undermining the legitimacy of militaristic, patriarchal, and (neo-) colonial practices, withdrawing technical support, and stopping sociological and cultural advisement. In another context, universities can establish partnerships with local immigrant communities. Collaborating with organizations that support refugees and migrants to co-develop research projects and educational programs addresses their specific needs and challenges. This could involve participatory action research documenting the experiences of migrants and developing policy recommendations. Researchers can implement decolonial methodologies by integrating non-Western perspectives and knowledge systems. This involves seeking out and citing scholarship from the Global South, collaborating with diverse scholars, and incorporating Indigenous and local knowledge into research projects. Regarding the intersections of gender, race, and migration, researchers can work with women's shelters and advocacy groups, documenting how affected migrants experience and resist violence. This highlights their resilience and agency, advocating for more inclusive support systems, contributing to the global movement against exploitation and marginalization. Drawing inspiration from principles of *Ubuntu* and *Buen Vivir*, for example, academic institutions can transform their practices to support a decolonial agenda, countering capitalist-patriarchal conditions and their destructive growth paradigm. This shift enriches academic discourse and ensures that knowledge produced within these institutions is connected to the lived experiences and struggles of marginalized communities globally. To further this integration, we believe it is crucial to link broader decolonial struggles with micro-level actions in academia, contributing to systemic change.

5 Connecting individual transformative practices in academia to broader decolonial struggles

As we navigate the challenging terrain of academic practices in gender research as in other fields, it is essential to introduce both a constant reflexive and action-oriented approach to our work and its institutional embedding. In our view, this involves both critical self-examination and openness to confronting the challenge of understanding how our actions perpetuate power relations on the one side as well as integrating forms of critical "contextual intervention" (Stein et al. 2021: 16) into our working routines and

bringing practical demands forward on an institutional level, to move from merely talking the talk to walking the walk by translating awareness into actual symbolic and material output (Torres Heredia/Slezak 2022: 8; Caceres 2017: 6). To make these practices more tangible, we would like to outline some considerations from a workshop held during the 8th Annual Conference of the Gender Studies Association Austria (ÖGGF), where we used everyday examples of intersectional invisibilities to *collaboratively* reflect on and navigate decolonizing practices in academic settings. Participants shared experiences and explored specific examples related to internationalization, mobility, university lectures, publications, event organization, speaker selection, and hiring practices to identify areas for decolonial transformation. To facilitate this reflection, we introduced the metaphorical journey on boats method, using nautical metaphors to evaluate practices – analogous to the caravels encountering the territories of Abya Yala/ Latin America, which marked a pivotal moment in the onset of colonialism: "Anchor" for stopping non-progressive practices, "Hold the Course" for continuing effective practices, and "Embark" for initiating new transformative actions. This approach invited participants to practice navigation, rerouting, and identifying guiding stars, providing a structured yet flexible way to explore and understand decolonial practices at both micro- and macro-levels. Participants appreciated the opportunity to discuss sensitive topics openly, recognizing themselves in the case studies and being surprised by the difficulty of navigating decolonizing practices, despite their extensive theoretical engagement with decolonization in their research and studies. Additionally, participants valued examining micro-level instances for implementing decolonial changes in specific academic contexts – some of which we will discuss next in this section – as these felt manageable compared to transforming global academia. Again, this is not an exhaustive checklist that we can tick away and one day proclaim we have indeed decolonized academia once and for all, but instead, some orienting stars. A standard practice, largely unquestioned even in the realm of feminist publishing, including this journal, is an ostensibly space-saving citation style that limits itself to mentioning a maximum of three authors per publication. The underlying rationale: to make citations more readable and concise while not disrupting the "flow" of the text. While this example might seem trivial, it highlights significant issues in academic practices and appears particularly anachronistic and inconsistent in the field of gender research, known to oppose implicit inclusion concerning gender identities. Considering that being cited has become mostly the only way to capitalize on – often precarious – scholarly work, a significant aspect of the "academic game" that brings considerable pressure to be visible, read, and even become a keynote speaker; highlights the substantial difference between being the person behind that one name mentioned as to being subsumed in the "et al." category. Furthermore, the citation style negates the practice of collective authorship, a deliberate choice often embraced by feminist and decoloniality movements emphasizing cooperative efforts and shared ownership. Moreover, citation practices offer significant intervention potential. Whom do we quote and why? Who is in the curriculum, and what are the main readings we use to train the future generation of a discipline? Or, to open another context: who is at the front of a classroom? What practices are prevalent in academia for recruiting professors, researchers, assistants, and students? Often, the negotiation processes within the context of these issues are criticized for the risk of losing one's

way in identity politics, in which individuals are essentially “filtered” based on identity markers (Swain 2019). As justified as this criticism may be regarding specific decision-making processes, it overlooks the historicity inherent in this logic and neglects the prevailing unequal distribution of visibility (in academia). Adopting an affective and relational position in this context entails acknowledging that marginalization based on identity categories is not a novelty but an established colonial practice that continues to shape knowledge production, even in the context of feminist movements dedicated to decolonization. As decolonial feminist Ochy Curiel pointed out emphatically during a conference in 2018: “It’s not the same to cite Judith Butler in your thesis than Ochy Curiel” (Curiel 2018). To address these issues, there is a need for a thorough examination of the fundamental structures of academic knowledge production. In recent years, this demand has been addressed in various formats, in many cases responding to student interventions (Peters 2018; Oliveira 2018; Jones-Gailani/Koçak/ul Khair 2019). As the examples mentioned above already indicate between the lines, action-oriented approaches go beyond posing questions and making demands. In our workshop, a significant aspect of critical contextual intervention was making room to express our emotions and the conditions we face while conducting our work. Such a stance stands in contrast to academic norms, and it is context-dependent to weigh the extent to which space can meaningfully be given to disruptive embodied knowledge and experiences (Tsymbalyuk 2022). However, this approach seems particularly relevant in feminist scholarship and related fields that navigate the dilemma of fulfilling emancipatory claims while, in practice, being deeply tied to the exclusions- and exhaustion-generating norms and structures they criticize (Pereira 2019: 172f., 180, 183). Hence, it is not enough to merely acknowledge embodied experiences on an intellectual level; in this context, the relational component becomes crucial: making it a routine to openly reflect on our actions, their meaning, and how they affect us, our bodies, and the people we work with and their bodies. With regards to the above-discussed ruptures produced by academic publication standards for instance, feminist scholar Maria do Mar Pereira openly declares the *discomfort* she feels while writing an article in English as a Portuguese researcher publishing in a Portuguese journal on case studies conducted in Portugal, subsequently “reproduc[ing] the academic hegemony of English and eras[ing] the idiosyncrasies of the Portuguese language and specificities of the Portuguese context” (Pereira 2019: 173) only to comply with “globalized” or “transcultural” academic standards, reproducing “cultural assumptions of academic writing” (cf. Cayla 2023). Of course, academic publishing is just one context among many others that cannot be exhaustively covered here. Rather, our intention is to provide food for thought and invite you as a reader to consider: what colonial practices resonate with your experience? What contexts can you relate to that you feel demand your attention and action? What does adhering to these practices entail, and what are the material and symbolic consequences? Prevailing academic research practices have drastically but quite accurately been criticized as a “rape model” (Lincoln quoted in Beld 1994: 107) of research. Particularly in fields of social research, ethical considerations should guide our choice of topics and how we approach them. Therefore, practically speaking, for instance, compensating participants for their time and contributions is crucial in this regard, even within the constraints of a limited budget. This involves honest conversations, negotiation, and a fair

exchange of what we can offer *in return* for their insights. As outlined in section 4, collaboration with experts in the field is another approach. Rather than merely interviewing experts, co-authoring pieces with them and sharing privileges, like access to journals, can amplify different perspectives. Another transformative strategy is incorporating feedback loops into research designs. Researchers should continuously engage with community stakeholders at all stages, ensuring their feedback shapes research questions, methodologies, and outcomes. For example, during project planning, regular consultations with community representatives help co-develop research frameworks that align with their needs and perspectives. This iterative process respects community input and empowers participants by validating their knowledge and experiences. On the contrary, traditional tools like paper forms, ethics forms, and consent forms for social research may only sometimes be the most effective means of negotiating and expanding our understanding of knowledge.

While these examples point to the importance of reflecting micro-level academic practices, it is essential to situate these efforts within the larger context of decolonial struggles, acknowledging that they, while significant, are only a part of the broader fight against colonial structures on the macro-level. Recognizing the interconnectedness of both dimensions, we argue, allows for a more comprehensive and effective approach to decolonization and transformative progress both within and beyond the walls of academia.

Table 1: Illustrative Table of the Anchor Method

Type of Action	Keep Course	Set Anchor	Lift Anchor
Purpose	To continue effective practices	To stop non-progressive practices	To initiate new transformative actions
Example	Recruiting keynote speakers from outside the North/Atlantic centers	Relegating Global South scholars and institutions away from global theory-making	Co-authoring with local experts, even if they are not from academic institutions

6 Final Reflections

Decolonizing academia is not a task that can be simply checked off a to-do list. Instead, we think of it as a process that should serve as a pervasive lens through which we examine our interactions in academia and society. It is a continuous call to reevaluate our approach to science and all aspects of our work and life and, as such, requires ongoing reflection, introspection, and a commitment to challenging the status quo. Broadly, we must question which academic practices reproduce exploitative structures, including those that invisibilize and singularize. Reflecting on the current state of decolonial feminist discourse, significant strides have been made in challenging entrenched power structures, with nuanced analyses exposing the complexities of the modern/colonial gender system. Still, the decolonial journey persists, navigating the delicate balance between global and local dynamics, and recognizing the need for solidarity amidst diverse

experiences. Decolonial feminisms are not a one-size-fits-all solution but an ongoing process of unlearning and relearning. While historical injustices are acknowledged and oppressive systems deconstructed, the challenge lies in forging practical pathways for transformative change within academic institutions' everyday work. In our experience, adopting an *action-centered perspective* serves as a productive approach to discussing (neo-)colonial practices. Simultaneously, it allows for the tangible exploration of individual and institutional responsibilities and privileges, which are often met in debates with defense mechanisms on one side and feelings of frustration, anger, or speechlessness on the other. This does not imply avoiding tough debates that address uncomfortable truths openly. By placing a particular emphasis on the micro level, we find the Anchor Method to be a valuable tool for the process of self-reflection and the journey of collaboratively exploring and rethinking our past, present, and future practices. It enables us to acknowledge the existing practices in a given institution that contribute to or obstruct the decolonial project, as well as identify new practices to initiate. Based on practical day-to-day examples, it becomes possible to discuss and learn from personal and shared insecurities, to become aware of underlying structures on the meta-level and dismantle silences and denials about tabooed "unearned *[dis-]*advantage" (McIntosh 2010 [1989]: n. p., emphasis DPG/DB).

However, while the reflection on micro-level action and the incorporation of self-criticism are vital, they of course only represent a small part of the broader multifaceted decolonial project, which involves questioning and transforming entrenched hierarchies and power dynamics that perpetuate colonial legacies. Structural changes, such as revising hiring practices to promote diversity, ensuring equitable distribution of resources, and dismantling Eurocentric curricula, are necessary steps in this direction. Also, academic institutions must connect with and support larger decolonial movements. This includes aligning with efforts to protect indigenous land rights, combat environmental destruction, and fight against gender-based violence. Forming partnerships with activists and community organizations can amplify these struggles. Recognizing and valuing knowledge systems outside traditional academic boundaries is equally essential. Moving beyond the ivory tower, academic institutions should further actively engage with local communities and collaborate with non-academic institutions integrating indigenous, and community-based knowledge into research and teaching. This involves participatory research projects that address community needs, public scholarship that makes academic knowledge accessible and relevant, and educational programs that empower marginalized groups. Finally, academics have a role in advocating for policies that support decolonial goals. This includes lobbying for the protection of Indigenous activists, promoting environmental sustainability, and pushing for legal frameworks that recognize and respect diverse cultural practices and knowledge systems. By recognizing the interconnectedness of individual and systemic change, we ensure that academic practices contribute meaningfully to the global movement for decolonization, fostering transformative progress both within and beyond the walls of academia. This holistic approach moves academic work beyond self-reflection to actively support and amplify the efforts of those fighting for justice and sustainability on the ground. One of our tasks in decentering and decolonizing knowledge(s) includes recognizing and acknowledging the co-production character of knowledge, which is why we want to conclude by draw-

ing attention to our extensive bibliography to sustain chains of knowledge production and keep existing concepts and initiatives circulating.

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