CHAPTER 8

Engaging in a Movement of Cognitive Justice at the Gulu University K4C Hub, Uganda

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> Let us come together to create that unique moment when the inner voice of disenfranchisement meets the outer voice of empowerment; When the inner cry for self-determination meets the warm embrace of co-determination.
>
> CATHERINE ODORA HOPPERS, 2021

Abstract

In this case study, the Gulu University Knowledge for Change Hub located in Northern Uganda reflects on the possibilities of knowledge pluralism, relationships and power in the work done by the hub, and shares some lessons that were learnt from engaging in a movement of cognitive justice. The research for this case was conducted using a collaborative community-based approach that included active participation of all hub members in the formulation of research questions, data collection, and analysis. In this type of approach, the documentation of the process and dissemination activities becomes part of the data collected, which is then used to inform future direction and activities for the hub. The research therefore fits into the reflexive and ongoing process of the hub, and is useful for improving the praxis and goals to further knowledge democracy and solve local problems through community-based research.

Keywords

cognitive justice – knowledge pluralism – process documentation – research dissemination – knowledge communication

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1 Introduction

The Gulu hub is an initiative of the Gulu University under the Knowledge for Change (K4C) initiative of the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. The hub's work is linked to the university's mandate "for community transformation" oriented toward serving the geographic space of Northern Uganda. It is a somewhat unique hub, because it does not have formal space within the university, and most of the hub's activities are generated through informal community partnerships and networks.

The Gulu hub's partners are defined by parameters of social and epistemic justice (Monk et al., 2020). That is, the hub works with organisations in Northern Uganda, including Gulu University, that have an interest in promoting social justice and authentic participation in decision making processes. Another layer of community partnerships for the Gulu hub includes a broader network of intellectuals both within Uganda and internationally that are committed to promoting and learning from Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS).

Placing relationships first is at the core of the Gulu hub's multi-layered sense of community and research. The academic members of the hub use relationships with the community to advocate for a participative culture of research and learning within the university. Linked to this is the university's efforts to create enabling institutional policies for community engagement. The university promotes IKS through program development and using IKS as the foundational culture of Community University Engagement (CUE). This knowledge distinction is important to note in the context of community engagement by the Gulu hub, because the Gulu community is diverse, with influences from both IKS and Ameripean (Ndawula, 2017)[1] epistemic paradigms. An example of this is in the herbal medicine program described in this chapter.

An IKS-based understanding of community engagement positions the university as one (important) actor within a learning ecosystem – an important departure from objective and linear understandings of research and the role of universities, which typically centre the university or position it as the only ("uni") actor (Visvanathan, 2006). Odora Hoppers (2021) explains that universities (generally) associate knowledge production with university experts and thus purposefully separate the university and its research from the lifestyles and lifecycles and cosmologies of the communities in which they are embedded. This separation fractures relationships and isolates universities. In contrast, IKS based research and community engagement is relational and relies on shared experiences, transdisciplinarity and mutuality (Ndawula, 2017; Odora-Hoppers, 2021). IKS recognises research and knowledge production as a shared community responsibility emerging from deeply entangled



FIGURE 8.1 Gulu university Inter-Nation gathering at the Pharmbiotrac Village, Gulu City, Uganda
PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID MONK

relationships based on respect and reciprocity with all species, both now and in the future. Thus, using IKS as a framework for CUE repositions the university as "multi" rather than "uni", with a focus on relationships, participation, and actively seeking to promote cognitive justice.

This sense of interconnectedness provides a continuity of shared experience whereby the traditionally separated knowledge generation, validation, and diffusion, are entangled and shared as part of a longer term project of community wellbeing. Finding ways of integrating the useful technical elements of this 'conventional' research regime into a paradigm of democratic knowledge culture requires careful interpersonal and intercommunity communication. The Gulu hub, and the research it has done under the BKC project, exists in this context of promoting a culture of IKS as both a method for CUE and an activity of cognitive justice.

In the sections that follow, the authors expand on literature about epistemic injustice, cognitive justice and the Afrikan Indigneous Knowledge Systems (AIKS), thereby to providing a theoretical framework to describe the context and composition of the research undertaken by the Gulu Hub. They go on to elaborate the research processes, identify some learning themes, critically reflect on these themes, and conclude with some general insights on the implications

from this research on bridging knowledge cultures. The titles of the sections in this chapter are a deliberate attempt to shift away from language and writing that we feel separates us from the participative nature of the research process.

2 Epistemic Injustice and Cognitive Justice

Miranda Fricker (2007, as cited in Tuana, 2017, p. 132) defines epistemic injustice as "the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experiences obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource". Pohlhaus (2017) explains that epistemic injustice is a function of silencing individuals and groups of people's ability to authentically contribute to social pools of knowledge. Medina (2017) elaborates that epistemic injustice is often structural and socially constructed to the extent that entire groups of epistemically oppressed people are taught – and often believe – that they do not know. Patricia Hill Collins (2017) explained that the accreditation of theoretical knowledge over embodied knowledge is a core function of "othering" marginalised people(s). Collins (2017) frames the silencing as violence that functions to maintain and reproduce privilege, through *epistemic gatekeepers* who carefully construct narratives and contexts that decide what knowledge counts.

Visvanathan (2006) explains that cognitive justice is the right of all forms or traditions of knowledge to co-exist *in public* without duress. Odora Hoppers (2009, 2021) provides depth to this definition of cognitive justice through her work on IKS. Odora Hoppers emphasises that cognitive justice requires authentic respect and dialogue across knowledge cultures. She centres cognitive justice as a fundamental human right and precondition to developing equal societies. Both Visvanathan (2006) and Odora Hoppers (2021) stress the importance of IKS for planetary survival because it is based on ontological foundations of intersubjectivity and continuity of relations beyond the human lifeworld and human life-time. It therefore promotes transdisciplinarity and allows for a deeper connection to the non-visible and subconscious realms of knowing. In the next section, we offer some literature about IKS in the Ugandan context.

3 Afrikan Indigenous Knowledge Systems

In the poem entitled *Wer pa Lawino*, the poet p'Bitek (1984) asserts that Afrikan culture and values need not emulate European standards in order to

be recognised. The poet's work is filled with the recognition that indigenous knowledge systems are fighting a losing battle in the face of modernization. The section of the poem, "The graceful giraffe cannot become a monkey", highlights the differences between the Whites and Africans, and the pride of an Acholi woman in her culture and identity amidst colonial attacks on it. In general, the feelings in the poem are more of pride, pity, protest, anger and boldness.

By moving away from defining knowledge within the strict confines of how the Western epistemology recognises knowledge, authors are faced with the task of refining the concept of what is considered knowledge within the African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS). Odora Hoppers (2021) points out that the value of AIKS is located in its understanding that culture is knowledge. She gives the example of Ubuntu, which is a philosophy derived from traditional ways of living, emphasising interconnectedness as the key element for understanding human behaviour and thinking.

Elements of AIKS, this way of knowing are revealed in the relationship between indigenous communities and their ecosystems. Among several communities within Uganda, designated forested areas were not subjected to firewood gathering or timber logging. This was primarily due to the belief that spirits of the ancestors/gods lived within these large trees and cutting them down would infuriate the ancestral spirits, which in turn would rage against the community's crops and livestock. This knowledge system, like several others, was challenged by the arrival of the church missionaries into Acholi land. The missionaries were offered such gazetted forest areas in the hope that once they cut the trees during their settlement process, they would be struck down by the spirits. When this did not occur, the resultant doubts among the community of their spiritual leaders appears to have accelerated condemnation of indigenous knowledge. They did not wait long enough to see the impact. However, indigenous knowledge began to be devalued also due to the application of a missionary framework of (ignorant) interpretation, criticized by p'Bitek. What if the message in regard to the trees was not to do with disturbing the spirits but more about conservation? For example, the Acholi had a saying that you do not defecate on the river banks, otherwise the mother of the river will twist your intestines and cause you to die. Other sayings state that you do not sit on the grinding stone, otherwise your mother will die. These teachings appear aimed at ensuring hygiene behaviour of children within the community. Defecating on the river banks would disperse human waste into the river system, affecting downstream communities. A young child with an uncovered bottom would pollute the grinding stone, used for processing the family meal. When looked at from this perspective, it is difficult to discount these knowledge systems which are connected to the practical needs of daily life.

Much indigenous knowledge is created and shared using all of the senses based in a relational ontology, which interprets and creates knowledge multimodally and together with the non-human world within a non-linear temporal perspective (Odora-Hoppers, 2009; Visvanathan, 2006). Translating embodied, tacit knowledge into text is a difficult task because it requires translations of feeling, intuition and sensory experiences. Knowing and interpretation of knowledge is often embodied and moves beyond rationalisations, intertextual and inter-language experiences and, therefore, as p'Bitek warns, cannot be understood through a European lens.

4 The Gulu K4C Hub

The Gulu K4C hub was founded in 2018, under the leadership of the Vice Chancellor of Gulu University. Gulu University is a leading public university established in 2003 in Gulu City, which is a rural city in Northern Uganda, in a period of dynamic transformation following 20 years of civil war ending in 2007. The hub conducts training in participatory research processes, with emphasis on art-based inquiry, particularly in photo voice, poetic inquiry, paint-based inquiry and theatre inquiry. The arts facilitate embodied and nonlinear connections and relationships which help connect deeply with the world (Monk, de Oliveira & Salvi, 2019). The hub has initiated its efforts in community settings, working mostly with youth on a variety of research and community projects, and sharing the informality of learning and doing in the community. The hub intentionally takes the time to listen and share through authentic participation, developing strong partnerships and relationships by working with the community through hub partners. Shared projects include a youth-initiated program to plant trees on all the streets of Gulu, ongoing participation in street-based art groups, and research with a Community Based Organisation (CBO) on waste management in Gulu. The hub has no core funding, so projects are based on voluntary work and disparate grants sought out in partnership with community organisations. Current active partners include:

- Gulu University: Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, Faculty of Medicine (Public Health and Herbal Medicine program), Faculty of Education and Humanities
- CEED Uganda: Youth empowerment CBO with a focus on gender and environment
- Partners for Community Development: Grassroots political and environmental activist organisation
- Kijani Trees: Private enterprise involved in sustainable agroforestry
- Afrigreen Sustain: Environmental CBO

- Starface CAMP (Youth group): Focused on multiculturalism and developing pathways in the arts
- Loremi Tours: Social enterprise focused on environmental and cultural tourism
- Taka Taka Plastics: Private environmental enterprise that makes building materials using recycled plastics. It is also a strong force in the environmental movement in Gulu.
- UNESCO Chair in Lifelong Learning Youth and Work (hosted at Gulu University)

Building on these networks and informal partnerships, the hub has begun to engage with the university through Memoranda of Understanding with the faculty of agriculture and environment and with the herbal medicine and indigenous knowledge programs, launched in 2018 in the Faculty of Medicine.

The herbal medicine and indigenous knowledge program uses an IKS framework of transdisciplinary learning that integrates chemistry, biology, pharmacy, agriculture and spirituality. The program delivery uses some classroom lecture sessions; however, it is mainly based in a collaborative and experiential learning model that relies heavily on the prior learning of herbal medicine practitioners. It revolves around validating the experience and knowledge of the practitioners, preserving biodiversity and culture, integrating business and marketing, as well as medical research and copyright procedures to meet the licensing demands of the National Drug Authority. Gulu University has a laboratory that is used to test new products, but much of the research and learning is done through ceremony, dreams, dance and food around the traditional learning space – the campfire. The hub has also led a series of inter-nation gatherings of indigenous knowledge holders from the Bunyoro kingdom, Buganda kingdom, Busoga kingdom and Acholi chiefdom. There is a strong focus on bringing Acholi elders together to inform and lead these inter-nation gatherings, particularly in partnership with the deeply community ingrained herbal medicine practice and activism of Alice Lamwaka. Regular gatherings of elders are essential to the process of relationship building and connecting to the ongoing nature of knowledge production that is fractured by modernist universities. Gulu University has created a space on campus to host these gatherings in a village-like setting so that elders feel comfortable. The space is a location where herbal doctors can experiment and share their remedies, preserve biodiversity and treat people. The location is next to a Gulu university laboratory where they can also perform tests such as phytochemical analysis. More recently, a university committee has been formed to integrate IKS in all programs at Gulu University, in which the hub is also participating.

5 Research Processes

This research is underpinned by an ontological understanding of intersubjectivity and interdependence of all species (Monk et al., 2020; Odora Hoppers, 2009; Visvanathan, 2006). Briefly, this means that we interpret the world as being a mix of diverse species that are reliant on each other for survival. Following from this, we value diversity in experience as we seek to understand our world. The research has been a collaborative process between hub members, and as a result it has used multiple forms of learning together including dance, ceremony, food, storytelling, energy sharing, interviews and focus group discussions. Two research assistants were hired from within the hub and worked with the research lead to facilitate the research. It is an ongoing process of reflection, participation, analysis and action. Not all of the learning can be translated into written expression, but we do our best to share the written representations which deepen understanding of the overarching research question.

The particular research direction and questions were developed cooperatively in a meeting with all hub members at the outset of participation in the BKC research project in 2019. The hub decided that the process of conducting this research should also contribute towards developing the strategic direction of the hub, as expressed by one of our advisors, Professor Catherine Odora Hoppers, when she asked us in a reflection session: *How can we uncover and support what has made resilient societies worldwide, and find out whether we have something different to say to them?* To this end we used a mix of research mechanisms including storytelling and interviews. The focus of the research was on relationships that are being developed, the knowledge cultures being brokered, and the resulting type of action and community impact. This was informed by an initial report led by one research assistant, analysing the indigenous knowledge cultures in Uganda, which informs the IKS literature shared earlier in this chapter. Briefly, the report emphasised the cultural and spiritual dimensions of Acholi knowledge making a framework for knowing that cannot be analysed or translated using a European lens. The knowledge making mechanisms include a spiritual understanding that goes beyond the human lifeworld but are practically located in efforts of life arrangements oriented towards peaceful coexistence.

The sub research questions we set as a team were oriented towards understanding power dynamics within the hub:

- What kinds of knowledge bridging partnerships exist in our hub?
- What are the power dynamics between the knowledge making partners and how can they be improved?

– What are the core components needed for authentic and equal knowledge making partnerships?
– What are some of the difficulties involved in community university partnerships and how can they be overcome?
– What is the viability of a sustainable centre for community-based research at Gulu University, and what is required?

6 Learning

Learning occurred through participation and reflection on hub activities, interviews, and focus group discussions.

6.1 *Focus Group Discussion*

A series of reflection sessions among hub members were facilitated throughout the research process using different approaches. For example, riddles, dance therapy, medicinal practice demonstration, food sampling, ceremony and storytelling were used in the learning circles around the fire at the Gulu University biodiversity and cultural preservation centre. We loosely refer to this as a type of focus group discussion, though these sessions were led by elders, and documentation involved observation and deep sensory experiences, some of which simply cannot be translated here. We also facilitated an inter-hub gathering (organised in partnership with the West Virginia K4C hub) with K4C hubs in South Africa based at Durban University of Technology, Rhodes University, and University of the Free State, which took place over two days and involved deliberation on the research questions. The video recording, presentations and shared notes were reviewed as a component of the research.

Another focus group discussion used art-based inquiry with hub members to enter more deeply into the power dynamics of the hub and its affiliated networks. In this particular form of inquiry, we asked members to draw pictures on sticky notes in response to the research questions – a separate drawing for each sequential research question. The members then placed their pictures on a power matrix drawn on poster. The power matrix was a simple matrix with four quadrants – the vertical axis representing power hierarchies and the horizontal axis representing power distribution. The top left quadrant represents considerable hierarchical power that is not shared. The bottom left represents little power, also not shared. The bottom right is little power with more sharing, and the top right represents high power that is highly collaborative.

Participants placed their picture in any quadrant according to how they thought their response represented power dynamics and decision making, and

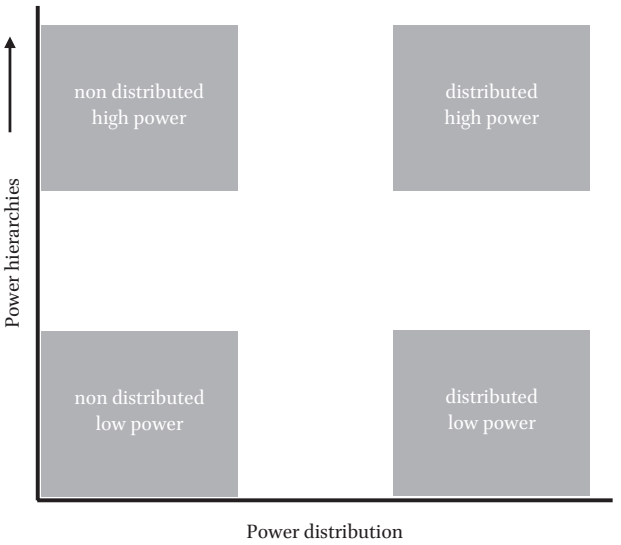

FIGURE 8.2 Power matrix



FIGURE 8.3 Focus group discussion with hub partners using power matrix
PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID MONK

explained how their pictures represent answers to the question as well as why they selected that location on the power matrix.

6.2 *Key In-depth Individual Interviews*

Interviews were conducted with traditional herbalists, project leaders, community based organisations, Gulu University Herbal Medicine lecturers, the office of community university engagement and some hub members.

6.3 *Participant-Observation*

Learning also included observing participants in hub activities, which included – (1) inter-nation gatherings of indigenous knowledge holders: an assembly of elders from different nations in Uganda (with analysis of the planning meetings and reports of the gatherings); (2) Wang OO (elders' fire of wisdom, the traditional classroom); (3) Two (annual) Traditional Medicine weeks, and (4) training of Traditional Herbalists. The researchers observed the process from making of herbs to the final product in quality conditions. Ethical considerations were adhered to include protection of Intellectual Property Rights of herbal practitioners, particularly the Covilyce-1 remedy to COVID 19, which is an innovation of the herbal medicine program and is undergoing clinical trials in order to translate validity into Ameripean science paradigms.

6.4 *Critical Reflection*

Learning was collated and analysed in ongoing cycles of reflection throughout the research among all hub members. Participatory research processes recognise participants as expert knowledge holders and therefore include them in the entire research process (Tandon et al., 2016). In this process, the analysis itself becomes another source of learning, in an ongoing cycle of reflection and action (Hall, 1985). In the reflection sessions, hub members were asked to reflect on the discussions and identify themes and their implications. Their inputs became a component of the learning.

To delve deeper into the initial broad areas of inquiry, the two research assistants and the research lead coded the interviews and personal observations, first independently identifying additional emerging themes and then comparing and discussing them together. This was presented to the hub members for further reflection before collaboratively taking a final decision on how to present them. Partners and participants names are included, where requested by them. All participants are members of the Gulu Hub network, and there is deep bias ingrained in the research and this report. Acknowledging that this is a learning endeavour in which we are all intertwined aligns with our ontological understanding of intersubjectivity and interdependence. Epistemologically speaking, this connects to learning as being interpreted, and meaning being made through applying our diverse experiences to situations that we are part of, not removed from. We hope that our open and reflexive collective voice can share some of the emotion and passion we have in a deeper intertextual shared sensory experience with the reader. We therefore try to bring in longer quotations. We consider this to be important for translating those aspects of the sensory and emotional knowledge that we have gained and is difficult to express within the limits of written text.



FIGURE 8.4 Gulu university Wang OO bonfire where elders provide knowledge, vision, wisdom and understanding of indigenous knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge Systems
PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID MONK

7 Learning Themes

In what follows we share the findings according to the core themes that emerged to better understand knowledge bridging relationships. We draw on the literature related to cognitive justice which emphasises reciprocity, respect and dialogue. The findings are framed in the power dynamics (based on the reflections) and attempts to bridge the structural limitations to validating and respecting the contributions of IKS to the general pool of social knowledge making.

A vital point to understand in the interpretation of the findings is that the hub, while considering ongoing work moving forward, does not lay claim to developing the associated work of our affiliated partners, such as those of the herbal medicine program, which have been built over considerable time and with considerable effort. As participants in our hub, some of the members have chosen to share their experiences in developing partnerships, and we include this in the research, as by extension we are involved in shared activities and vision. In terms of bridging knowledge cultures, we are

moving forward and learning together as we reflect on the different partnerships and networks that we have. In the presentation of members' perspectives, we hesitatingly differentiate between the background of the members (community, university, teacher, herbal doctor, etc), to provide some insight into how the hub is composed; however, identities and roles of the members are fluid and are not solely represented in the titles we have associated with them.

7.1 *Theme 1: What Healthy Relationships Look like*

In terms of bridging knowledge cultures, the participants emphasised that centring healthy and balanced relationships, rather than individual short term research projects, was important. This is a major theme because it re-visions research as an ongoing process that emerges from community contexts among partners with similar learning interests. This re-centring shifts traditional separations of the researcher and the researched. One university partner reflected on this shift:

> As a researcher, as soon as I entered her house I entered a relationship. She was not interested in my particular research questions, she was interested in sharing her story. She invited me into her life by sharing her story. She served me food, I met her family and neighbours. I am not a stranger, I am a trusted friend worthy of sharing food and discussing a common issue. That conversation provided far more insight than if we had met as strangers. But she is now part of this research, and I am bound ethically to continue to work on this issue and other issues that come up in that community – not just on my terms. I am no longer other, and that comes with responsibility. Research is about people's lives – real people – not objects. It is serious".

Beyond the ethical implications observed above, centring relationships muddles the whole idea of research as being bound by time and questions. It entangles conventional linear research paradigms of knowledge generation, validation, diffusion and use into an ongoing process of transdisciplinary meaning-making in a world that is ongoing and emergent. Relationships enhance an intrinsic drive for learning, personal contentment, peer recognition and self-actualization. This is reflected on by a university partner: "What K4C Gulu Hub needs is a diverse and multifaceted knowledge system in which techniques are continuously updated to reflect current understanding and needs". Likewise a community partner reflects on the importance of bringing together diversity, and not thinking of community as homogenous:

> There was initial interaction with the community, institutions and even the communities themselves, the people in the community to guide how the research should be done. So, I think that was really, really nice work. And it kind of brought that togetherness between the community and the university, also giving opportunity for the youth to air out their thoughts.

A community partner described a picture of a tree they drew that represented healthy relationships as, "a form of empowerment. So, for me, I looked at that" [picture of a tree] "as symbolising birth, power; life, and politics changes the community". This reorients research as a broader conceptualisation of a flourishing community, as one academic partner suggests: [We have to think] "what are the reasons for research and knowledge we are trying to build in these communities? For me, it's around environmentally sustainable futures for everything, for people and the planet".

The hub partners all felt that building relationships required meeting regularly, not only for research purposes, but as an academic partner observed: "We are developing some important networks nationally and internationally … that engage people in different ways but are all very important ways of staying connected to each other". Likewise, a community partner explained that meeting regularly de-centres the university and builds "a common ground, and acknowledges both power dynamic and fully equal participation of the community".

Another community partner reflected how their organisation uses a "group of community called reflection action groups" in their own practice. They explain that these are fundamental to setting the organisation's work because the reflection action groups, "will sit and discuss what is wrong for them".

Creating spaces and concerted action to understand the full ontological underpinnings of different traditions of knowledge was seen as essential. Simply listening or letting people speak is not sufficient for understanding, though it is seen as a starting point as one community partner suggests: "bridging knowledge cultures can be improved by recognising the voice of all and to understand that boundaries are fluid … thus knowledge and values will always interface with another".

In terms of bridging knowledge cultures, relationships open up an opportunity for what Odora Hoppers (2021) refers to as inter-personal and inter-community communication and understanding. We will finish this theme on healthy relationships with a quote from one of the academic partners, which sums up their value: "Essentially, CBR builds on the way that engagement between practitioners/communities and researchers generates opportunities to bring very diverse resources to understanding causes of, and solutions to, wicked societal problems".

7.2 *Theme 2: Barriers to Healthy Relationships*

Most of the hub reflections are oriented towards challenging the traditional university approach towards knowledge and research. This is because the current paradigm of knowledge production is dominated by Ameripean approaches. Hub partners reflected on the power imbalance and ways to promote IKS.

Broadly speaking, the core problem that stakeholders observed was that community has little agency when it comes to relationships. An academic partner explained,

> The community has been ignored for a very long time. And yet, there is a lot of knowledge down there, which is not disseminated. So, I feel that this is because the decisions are normally made from the top … ignoring the other one. And then when somebody talks, and you get a very important finding, even when you know that the knowledge was got from there, there's no recognition. It remains up. And it's usually [remains] like that.

A community partner reflected on a research project they were in, where they felt objectified and excluded:

> the decisions were made by researchers or the lead team. Once you have made up your mind, you don't want to listen to anyone, no one wants to listen, she needs to say yes, I've got it, it's me, it's me who has this, it's me who got the money, we will have this so you don't listen to anybody else. So we lose out a lot on that.

An university partner agreed that power is often unbalanced in research and adds that it is often defined by funders' requirements:

> Top down, we had the power. Gulu University now, we did a lot of formal traditional research. So we went to stakeholders, and we would ask them, approach them to do focus group discussions and interviews. That's very top-down. You know, we decided based on what other people [wanted from us].

Reliance on funders and their associated demands and expectations is challenged as a structural problem that has created a dependency on money and consequent control by the people who own the structures we buy into. A community participant reminds us that,

> money is a perceived challenge and we are chasing it a little bit always … we think that we can't bring our community together without money. Time is also a resource that we measure in a very linear way and we have our lives that we are measuring, so we are doing lots of things. Community often changes with very little budget and often no budget.

7.3 *Theme 3: Focus on Community and IKS*

As explained in the introduction, the Gulu hub and Gulu university attempts to use an IKS framework to interpret and build relationships in the community. It is therefore not surprising that this emerged as a theme.

One participant from the university explained, "Often the most important resource is forgotten: The knowledge and power of working together". This is an important point when it comes to building IKS which relies on the ontological assumption of shared experience and values the diverse skills and knowledge that exist in the community. Relying on money as the only conceptualisation of wealth demeans community knowledge and plays into the carefully constructed hierarchies of knowing and the narrative of Ameripean universality that permeates the traditional university. A community member recognises that reorienting and rebalancing relationships requires finding a more balanced sharing of all wealth, including money: "The element of trust plays a big role in engagement and we start with probably the youth group, this means money is coming into it unless people can come up with things". Devaluing culture and other ways of knowing also reduces the financial contributions back to the community.

Legal rights were also a core concern related to valuation of herbal doctors. In developing processes for drug certification, this was especially relevant. There have been many experiences of researchers coming and taking information, transforming it, and claiming it as their own. Herbal doctors were therefore afraid of people stealing their cures. Odora Hoppers (2009) has elaborated on how this happens in the pharmaceutical industry. However, this is not isolated to herbal medicine. Denigrating people to objects and claiming knowledge superiority lies at the centre of colonisation and the justification of exploitation (Ndawula, 2017; Odora Hoppers, 2021; Visvanathan, 2006).

The community partners working in indigenous science emphasised a feeling of not being accepted by society, because the communicative structures on the part of the dominant paradigm of knowing are unable to interpret or understand the different knowledge systems. One practitioner explained that, "the population still shuns traditional medicine and associates it with witchcraft/ being evil … thus mindset is a limitation to knowledge culture".

Indigenous knowledge holders were seeking ways of opening the channels of communication, by packaging their products in ways people can understand. Two traditional healers from the Pharmbiotrac project were of the view, "that the traditional set up of the structures is not conducive and doesn't attract those seeking traditional and contemporary health service".

Challenging the epistemic narrative that separates culture from knowing, and knowing from certain communities, is therefore a foundational activity in the search for cognitive justice and any attempt to bridge knowledge cultures requires efforts to include meaningful epistemic dialogue and reciprocal relations which equally value different contributions (financial or otherwise) to a flourishing society.

7.4 *Theme 4: Research Solutions*

Developing more balanced research partnerships and overcoming cultural hierarchies has partially been discussed in the theme of relationship building. However, hub participants also reflected on the particularities of reconciling research methods within relationships. This comes back to the purpose of research and the related outcomes.

A partner from a CBO explained that research needs to be more of a cyclical process because: "R&D is used for the communities, which will then go back to the communities and work with them … a kind of relearning, which then puts it more towards the community based research".

A university partner emphasised that inclusion can take time, which is conceived of differently by the university and the community, but it is important to respect this. "I think we also need to let them give us their view, so that we can move together without leaving anyone behind". The same partner elaborated that knowledge dissemination has to be done differently as well so that "the community fully understand and also disseminate this knowledge locally".

A different university partner reflected on a research program that shifted this power dynamic:

> like this formulation lab, right, where we put some space more in the hands of the community … a little bit more … I'm thinking about when we did the talk with the elders. So that was a component of where we were trying to build and connect with things in a more open way where we weren't going to, we weren't deciding how things were being done.

Likewise, a community partner reflected on a different project: "We went to the youth group, and they decided the questions that we were going to ask and where we were going to do it and how we were going to do it".

Creating spaces of epistemic equality requires valuing the entire research process, not just deciding what questions to ask. An academic partner emphasised that this is especially true in the case of "peer review and validation of the research or work rather than the traditional peer review so that the community accepts it".

Furthermore, sharing in the benefits of the research is crucial for equal and healthy relationships. Participants reflect on instances of shared impact across the community. For Gulu University Vice Chancellor, Openjuru, the relationships that Gulu University has fostered with the community,

> has led to numerous achievements like the innovation of Covilyce-1 herbal remedy for Covid-19; agri-business entrepreneurship; Mango Enterprise by Faculty of Agriculture; water drillings; and contribution to peace restoration. Testing of the entire town of Gulu by Gulu University has also improved more engagement and participation in the vaccination [effort], and has strengthened engagement both nationally and internationally.

Another example is given by a teacher in the herbal medicine program. They explain that the students trained in the herbal medicine program (Pharmbiotrac), "are helping out in the various communities like Omoro, Teso, Lira in managing diseases using indigenous knowledge and culture".

A practical example of social contribution comes from a traditional herbalist doctor:

> Now it is those who can afford and look at modern treatment as the best treatment. However, those that cannot afford, go to herbalists for healthcare. The relationship we have with Gulu University, Pharmbiotrac has created access to healthcare for the disadvantaged.

Reconceptualising research impact without borders of time or particular orientation was seen as important, as one community participant inquired: "So how impactful is a two-year project that eventually goes away or a one-year project? What impact are you going to leave there and how sustainable are our projects"?

All of these instances demonstrate that social impact is a core component of authentic and reoriented paradigms of research partnerships. The empowering nature of the research opens up potential for deep community change.

7.5 *Theme 5: Future Directions*

Bridging knowledge cultures is not a small endeavour, it requires reorienting an entire paradigm of living, within which the university, as an acknowledged

knowledge producer, must play a significant role. In this final theme, hub members reflect on the practical and strategic role the hub can play to further knowledge democracy and cultural plurality in the Gulu community.

A core strength of the hub is recognising that it is a network of differently abled and differently interested people, with different cultural and knowledge backgrounds. An academic partner explains that, "Appreciating and redesigning community solution in partnership gives us an opportunity, because we all have different expertise on how best we can redesign the solutions … the community has these solutions but it is a dream, not yet modified".

A community partner suggested that this is effective both in terms of funding, but also in developing a transdisciplinary understanding of community:

> We have effective partnerships and networks and what we have been doing is building on the momentum of the different partners and different projects that come in so there is money, research projects that come here with this money and we need to integrate this research with [our] research.

Our hub could do better in coordinating the disparate parts of our networked efforts. A university partner reflects:

> We need to coordinate, we need to share perspective for us to be effective … as said earlier, the different projects have to contribute to the centre. Finding sustainable local solutions to global societal challenges requires the active engagement of a variety of stakeholders. We need to know about how wide our branches going to the community are to make sure that at least everybody is aware about something, about what we are doing, about the research.

Expanding personal and community learning and embodied practice is seen as the most essential work needed. One university partner suggested this can be done through:

> inductive training of all decision makers like K4C Gulu Hub and its partners on how to find research evidence in relation to indigenous knowledge, for instance in education, agriculture. Initial training, however, is effective only if it is supplemented by refresher sessions. For instance, it is advisable for every decision maker to do a search and review it with a skilled searcher several times a year. And skills of appraisal in K4C activities need to be developed during training.

A community partner felt that there

> is a need for creation of modules for informal education to build Acholi culture especially during the Wang OO in the forest that will build on children, youths' morals and character. Through this, the indigenous knowledge will continue spreading and remain intact in memory and transcribed in books.

These future directions point back to the rest of the themes, which are all oriented towards understanding and integrating IKS into practice. Shifting habits of research from objective to relational, knowledge cultures from linear to complex, and advancing cognitive justice takes time and requires an epistemic social movement. The Gulu hub has the goal to support this movement. Certainly, Gulu University as an institution is taking strides to be a leader in cognitive justice by establishing more equal partnerships with community and emphasis on integrating IKS.

8 Bridging Knowledge Cultures in Practice

Okot p'Bitek warns in his poems against using European frameworks to interpret Acholi life. He explains that it cannot be translated, but rather needs to be understood in Acholi, because the meanings are foundationally different. This forms the core point in our research findings. In our hub's very first meeting to discuss the research for this case study, members agreed that you cannot take the knowledge innovations and leave the Cen (spirts), dreamers, and rainmakers, because they are the scientists. Acholi scientists are able to communicate and interpret phenomena along dimensions that the Ameripean Knowledge Systems are not capable of. This comes from a relational understanding of time and being beyond human life-times. Much Acholi science comes from understanding vibrations and energies. Acholi scientists are able to communicate using vibrations to, for example, hold off rain or shift the landing location of locusts. The learning process is based on longstanding relationships and learning to communicate with the human and non-human world in a non-transactional, embodied way beyond the four dimensions perceived by Ameripean science.

Visvanathan (2006) suggests that the current crises of war and climate are related to a dominant paradigm of science which has fractured relationships to each other and to the world in which we live. A massive paradigm shift is

essential, not just for cognitive justice, but for the survival of the planet. This requires a shift in habits of perception and (re)learning how to "be", using more of our senses and keener atunement with phenomena, and recognising that seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling are more than what is visible or physical. In other words, we all need to become less ignorant, and this requires learning and interpreting differently.

The reflections that we have shared above point towards a reconceptualisation of research as embedded in a complex field of diverse and interdependent communities. In this section, we will deepen this learning from our research and convey impressions and insights from participant observations (made during inter-nation gatherings and herbal medicine week). We attempt to relay the significance and impact of bridging knowledge cultures in practice to the best of our ability in this written forma.

First, there are two very essential points we would like to make clear. For one, diversity and plurality of knowledges and cultures are essential to make meaning of our world (Hoppers, 2021; Husserl & Merleau-Ponty, 2002). The difficulty is that repression of knowledge systems (epistemic injustice) are used as a tool for colonisation and a rationalisation of violent oppression (Hill Collins, 2017). Second, great efforts must be made to understand and learn different approaches towards learning and living, including different knowledge systems. This requires broadening the scope of our shared hermeneutical resources, and trying to make meaning of differences that we do not have words or cultural capacities to fully understand.

The research we have conducted demonstrates just how important and difficult it is to communicate across knowledge (making) cultures. When it comes to knowledge production processes, our findings show our attempts to listen, learn and practice. Creating spaces for intra-cultural and inter-cultural dialogue and shared learning is what emerges as a good example at Gulu University. Inter-nation gatherings and herbal medicine awareness week are an important representation of the priority areas of the Gulu hub: building a public movement for IKS. These events also illustrate the difficulty involved in translating knowledge cultures. Representing the rich embodied intellectual work of all the senses is difficult to reduce to an Ameripean conception of learning. In her 2012 book, *Borderlands,* Gloria Anzaldúa explains how the Spanish colonisation process of Mexico, which involved stealing ancestral and cultural artefacts, removed the spiritual ceremonial power from these materials and reduced them to mere European artefacts. It is the same in other knowledges which, as Odora Hoppers (2021) explains, cannot be separated from culture.

Deep spiritual sensitivities and connective healing energies that comes from listening and attuning the senses to the land and energies around us occurred among the delegates sitting around the Wang OO, learning about how to set the fire according to the position of the moon, which wood to use, and the healing power of the fire. There are some things that we learn through sensory experience – without words we learnt many things and communicated at these gatherings.

Food and dance were integral to the entire process. Two full days were spent on learning about the medicinal value of different plants, food combinations and their preparation. Plants and knowledge were shared and exchanged between visiting chiefdoms and nations. Likewise, different dances were shared, including a dance therapy session that demonstrated through an intricate process of dance and drumming, a deep spiritual healing process where participants in the therapy were clearly in a trance and fully engaged with their deepest demons which were enticed out by skilful psychiatrists. The events brought together not only local participants (open to the public and publicly open), but also indigenous academics and leaders from different parts of Uganda and the world using digital technologies.

Reflecting from a meta perspective in terms of the power relations that this process embodied, it is clear that the elders took over and owned the entire process. The rich process of sharing knowledge and healing practices was a traditional academic activity. Elders taught traditional values and observed strict cultural protocols.

The social impact of these gatherings and the integration of knowledge was remarkably rich. First, the gatherings were connected to the herbal medicine, biodiversity preservation and cultural centre. The centre sits on land owned by the university. The space was developed according to a traditional Acholi *paco* (village). Youth who work with our hub in other contexts were recruited to build two large houses, outhouses, a granary, and clear the land for farming, thus engaging younger generations in the embodied cultural learning. A location for a shrine was set up and appropriate spiritual cleansing was done for the space.

The significance of these events cannot be understated. The Acholi chiefs and their parties heralded this shift at the university and took over the space. They saw it as a space for historical alignment and networking among indigenous knowledge keepers from the disparate nations. They host quarterly meetings in this space. Delegates from other nations commended the leadership of Gulu University to carry the epistemic momentum forward.

The early inter-nation gatherings catalysed discussion about herbal remedies for Covid-19 that were being used in different locations, which eventually

resulted in the development of Covelyce-1. With. A unique time and space has opened up, as the creation and clinical trials of Covelyce-1 challenge the colonised and capitalised research processes. Covelyce-1 has resulted in a series of activities with the National Drug Authority, National Council for Science and Technology (NCST), and the Ministry of Health (MoH). The President of Uganda is a strong supporter of developing IKS and has been a leader in initiating both public discourse and a mandate for the NCST and MoH to explore indigenous validation mechanisms and intellectual property rights of indigenous pharmacology. In turn, possibilities emerge for dialogue in other areas of indigenous science, not limited to indigenous knowledge in Acholi land, but broadly within the traditional academy.

Having Gulu University participate and lead in this process was essential in opening an academic dialogue that validates a different knowledge culture. The university is seen as a space of higher knowledge, and often a representation of and reproduction of colonial hierarchies and epistemic injustice. Crossing these boundaries at the university is an essential for breaking down fallacious epistemic hierarchies.

9 Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to reflect on the possibilities of knowledge pluralism and share some lessons that we have learned as we engage in a movement of cognitive justice. The Gulu Hub's pursuit of translating knowledge cultures is made possible largely through its informality and broader university vision and leadership, which itself is integrated and participating with(in) the wider community. The hub does not lay claim or seek ownership of community university dialogue or knowledge democracy. Rather, it is focused on developing relationships and networks among a vibrant community of existing initiatives which are bridging knowledge systems and promoting knowledge democracy. The main work of the hub is finding spaces to support and partner in a growing movement to include IKS in community development and improve dialogue across knowledge making cultures.

The power dynamics of the hub's work are more distributed because of this participative and supporting (rather than initiating) role. This forms one of our essential learning points. The other learning point is the creation of a distinct space for the practice of AIKS. The university provided space, built a traditional village on the university campus, and developed an integrated herbal medicine program which supports AIKS academic pursuits and publicly validates AIKS. This is also a space of (and for) knowledge brokering – lecturers and the public

cannot help but come and learn a little when the campfire is lit. Likewise, the indigenous practitioners are making good use of the university labs and expertise in branding and marketing. They also have a location to share their products in a place where the general public is comfortable to visit.

We would like to end this chapter on a cautionary note. The history of colonisation and epistemic injustice is based on a zero sum power game that suggests universality and ownership of truth. In his novel *Things Fall Apart* Chinua Achebe comments on the flexible nature of the oppressor, to always be lingering and ready to adapt to transformations and subversively return to oppress. In the pursuit for knowledge democracy, we see universities as places which need to change, and develop a stronger sense of mutuality and communication across knowledge systems in an effort to better meet the needs of society. However, universities are themselves colonial institutions and extraordinary spaces of epistemic injustice (de Sousa, 2015). From a broader social perspective, we draw on the warning of Achebe to caution against relying too much on the university as an institution and structure of knowledge plurality and a universality of knowledge cultures. Rather, as we seek out spaces for survival, flourishing and living together, we need to perhaps recognise and validate a plurality of spaces where this can happen differently, with toleration, respect and dignity.

Note

1 Ndawula uses 'Ameripean' to reflect the shared hegemony of White European and American epistemic cultures.

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