Falling into Gaps: Navigating Research Practices across Global South and Global North, a Conversation

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Abstract

This article is derived from conversations among four early career researchers on epistemic inequalities and challenges faced in universities, more especially in carrying out research. The conversations took place in the context of a qualitative research laboratory centered on the global South. We share experiences and issues associated with being trained as researchers in the global North and doing fieldwork in the global South. We also reflect on dominant structures and processes in universities and the marginalization of "other" or "alternative" knowledge systems. Whilst recognising the many ongoing and parallel academic discussions on such issues, we posit that there remains a need to carve out more discursive spaces for early career researchers to openly discuss their practical experiences, concerns, and strategies in challenging and overcoming issues such as the colonial gaze, racialization and coloniality of power, and to share appropriate approaches for research.

Keywords

Global South, qualitative research methodologies, early career researchers, discursive spaces, decolonial literature and discourse

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Falling into Gaps: Navigating Research Practices across Global South and Global North, a Conversation

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This article is derived from conversations among four early career researchers on epistemic inequalities and challenges faced in universities, more especially in carrying out research. The conversations took place in the context of a qualitative research laboratory centered on the global South. We share experiences and issues associated with being trained as researchers in the global North and doing fieldwork in the global South. We also reflect on dominant structures and processes in universities and the marginalization of "other" or "alternative" knowledge systems. Whilst recognising the many ongoing and parallel academic discussions on such issues, we posit that there remains a need to carve out more discursive spaces for early career researchers to openly discuss their practical experiences, concerns, and strategies in challenging and overcoming issues such as the colonial gaze, racialization and coloniality of power, and to share appropriate approaches for research.

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Introduction

Western-centric intellectual canon, methodologies, and knowledge production systems expect and even demand provincial, ideological alignment from researchers leading to epistemic inequality and marginalization of "alternative" knowledges and methods (see Bhattacharya, 2013; Chilisa, 2012). Consider Chilisa (2012, p. 55) on academic imperialism: "the unjustified and ultimately counterproductive tendency in intellectual and scholarly circles to denigrate, dismiss, and attempt to quash alternative theories, perspectives, or methodologies." As early career scholars, we reflect on how we are impacted by and navigate academic imperialism. Our conversation, in this article, is grounded in that core concern.

We discuss how our respective positionalities present additional challenges for we must constantly negotiate with the existing Eurocentrism[†] of research methods. At the same time our location also presents a space from which provinciality of methods could be overcome, or at least challenged. Bearing in mind our different disciplines, and as researchers/educators in/from the global South and based (or who have been based) in the global North, we ask ourselves: how do we respond to, overcome, and challenge coloniality in our practice?

Our reference to the global North and global South does not simply allude to the geographical divide; it ties into a critical appreciation of the historical processes of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, enslavement, dispossession, exploitation, appropriation (including

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[†] An ethnocentric tendency in research practices/approaches that privileges knowledge, inquiry, and experiences of Western scholars over their non-Western counterparts.

that of history and knowledge), and the resulting political, social, and economic inequalities (Dados & Connell, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Tafira, 2018). Our understanding also draws on the postcolonial discourse led by Homi Bhabha and Gayatri C. Spivak regarding resistance and the transformation of dominant Western narratives from a subaltern position;[‡] Julian Go's "subaltern standpoint" (2016a); and the decolonial discourse, which includes Anibal Quijano's notion of "coloniality of power" (2000), Walter D. Mignolo's thinking on "decolonializing and decolonial knowledges" (2009) and Raewyn Connell's "Southern theory" (2014).

The authors of this article are four early career researchers (ECRs). Our respective positionalities are defined by living in different geographical and cultural spaces in Scotland, Pakistan, India, Canada, Mauritius, Poland, and the United States, and through our academic training, institutional affiliation, and research in those spaces. Our research, which is largely qualitative, is rooted in different disciplines and focused on inequality in terms of gender, caste, class, poverty, healthcare, and regional/territorial development. Although our initial discussions were based on individual but often overlapping research interests, our discourse eventually shifted towards decolonial and postcolonial literatures and epistemologies. Those conversations, held over the last two years, helped us to understand the epistemic inequalities in global North universities, and to unpack the practical challenges three of us faced while conducting fieldwork in the global South.

Awareness of Epistemic Inequality

NK: As a researcher trained in the global North but conducting research/fieldwork in the global South, I often fell into the schisms defined by what I perceived as incompatibility (for lack of a better word) of research methods and practices/expectations in the two worlds. The differences in the field experience and theoretical groundwork were disorienting and led me to question my methodological approach for its suitability. Moreover, I found myself alone and isolated in the experience. In an effort to connect with scholars in a similar position to mine, I felt the need for a space where issues such as this could be discussed; hence, the idea and creation of the Qualitative Research Lab – global South (hereafter, the Lab) for a group of researchers to meet, share and discuss readings and each other's (ongoing) work – academic and otherwise – at least once a month online via Zoom.

The Lab was conceived as a space encouraging and amplifying qualitative research pertaining to the global South for networking, exploring potential collaborations, and for sharing work and seeking community feedback. Most of all, it was envisaged as a safe space where graduate students and early career scholars could express the issues and challenges they face during research across trans-geographical contexts of the global South and global North. Over time, a core group of the Lab gravitated towards engaging with decolonial and postcolonial literatures.

At the Lab, and in what follows, we ask questions not just to find answers, but for the rich conversations that emerge in looking for answers. In so doing, we contribute to the existing movement on decolonizing social sciences and research methods.

MM: Whilst there are various discourses happening on decoloniality and post-coloniality, early career researchers do not necessarily have significant opportunities to participate in those. For me, the Lab offered a safe space where we could openly express our voices, share practical experiences, and discuss past, current and future approaches to research. Like you, NK, I felt isolated and a deep sense of frustration (which SS probably sensed and hence invited me to join the Lab), though I carried out and continue to do research and teaching

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[‡] A position of social and political marginalization occupied by peripheral populations within global hierarchies (Spivak, 2010).

primarily in the global North. In part, my struggle has to do with the dissonance between my positionality and the enhanced awareness of the dominant ideologies, culture, and knowledge paradigms in universities associated with the historical context of colonialism within which many higher education institutions exist. What one can and cannot do, as early career scholars, is to a large extent determined by the underlying system in universities, including epistemic and administrative governance upheld in the form of policies, structures, and practices.

There is growing recognition for the need to challenge and dismantle forms of coloniality and colonial knowledge that are produced and institutionalised in universities (Bhambra et al., 2018) and to address associated issues of privilege, bias, unequal power relations, and inequity.[§] However, much remains to be done in practice. It is within this wider context that I consider my own experience in academia, especially with regards to research (but not limited to it), as the core activities (teaching, research, and service) in universities are interconnected and often impact each other.

Through the Lab, I had the opportunity to engage in reflexive dialogues, rethinking and challenging epistemic thinking that I had been taught both in Mauritius and in the West, thereby unlearning and developing new learnings, including those relating to how I can transform my research and teaching practice.

SS: I did not start thinking about the need to decolonize research methods for the global South until I was in the thick of fieldwork in rural Rajasthan, India. As a young, ambitious scholar influenced by disciplinary fads, I had chosen to study the impact of microcredit on the lives of women in rural India – a research area that was in vogue at the time I wrote my PhD research proposal. During conversations with my research participants, however, I discovered that they had more pressing concerns. In the first village, for example, women were worried about their loss of access to the Village Commons. Lands that are commonly managed and accessed by communities – such as village forests, community pastures, community threshing floors, and barren lands – are known as common property land resources, or simply as Village Commons. Women from poor households in rural India are especially dependent on these lands for basic necessities – such as fodder and firewood – to fulfill their traditionally ascribed roles, within the gendered division of household labor, of cooking and tending to the livestock.

SA: The development research that stems out, especially between 1960 and 1970, seemed to largely be done by researchers with little consideration of indigenous knowledges, spoken histories, and cultural norms. Another aspect of research done around this time is the lack of reflexivity, especially when it comes to examining assertions made about the global South from a global North perspective. The kind of research being done in Pakistan by Pakistani scholars, for example, is very different, being critical of the research undertaken by researchers from the 60s which remains influential despite being problematic. A decolonizing approach, then, is important as it might serve as a contrast. That said, there are of course ways in which I as a researcher might still be reproducing a modernity/colonial gaze given my education/training, background/privilege, et cetera. A decolonizing approach would then also be useful for people like me to ensure I am not reproducing the same knowledge through a problematic lens/methodology for which I critique others.

I started to think about decolonizing the research process as early as applying for the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval – how could I ask my participants, who often did not have access to a phone or an internet connection, to contact my US-based university if they wanted to rescind their consent or had questions about the process? Getting institutional approvals within the IRB process, too, alluded to an assumption that I was going to do research

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[§] Consider for exaxmple, UBC's Dimensions Action Plan for Equity Diversity Inclusion in Research, which mentions that: "At UBC, the dominant research culture is understood to prioritize Western, Eurocentric or colonial conventions, practices, values, etc." Retrieved from: https://equity3.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2023/04/UBCs-DimensionsActionPlan-EDIinResearch_05022023.pdf

in global North spaces that had the infrastructure or capacity of having ethical boards where I could get local approval. In fact, most universities in Pakistan are still not equipped with their own IRBs.

MM: Your point about potentially or unconsciously reproducing the colonial gaze as a consequence of one's own education resonates with me. I have been thinking about my own university education, mostly Eurocentric, and its influence on my approach to research and teaching. For me, concerns around colonization arose through my experience in the global North, more specifically in Canada. There are concomitant experiences linked to both research and teaching that led me to do a first-person inquiry into my own values, thinking, and action. Working in an indigenous territory settled over 100 years ago, I have listened, observed, and discussed issues pertaining to dominant forms of knowledge and practices that are inimical to other ways of knowing and action. For example, discussion with a student made me realize how problematic it was not to explicitly include indigenous methods and concerns in a master's program in Management.

My participation in the Lab, reading the works of diverse scholars from the global South and learning about experiences of researchers like yourselves studying/working in Western universities and doing fieldwork in the global South brought up issues; for example, around procedural requirements and constraints set by Research Ethics Boards (REBs). Your comment about institutional approvals within the IRB process reminds me of Eikeland (2006, p. 37), who refers to conventional research ethics as "condescending ethics unfit for action research because of its practice of 'othering' human beings as research subjects."

Consider also critique about the administrative nature of human subject reviews by IRBs/REBs and their ineffectiveness in appreciating key issues in qualitative research methodologies such as: research as a social activity; ethical decisions not being one-off but ongoing; and the non-vertical power relations between researchers and those who are typically considered as the "researched" (Musoba et al., 2014). For various qualitative research approaches - constructivist, participatory, transformative - doing research in real-life contexts necessarily involves "an openness to contingency" (Leisey, 2008, p. 422), adapting to interactions and new understandings with participants, collaborators, or co-inquirers (who are not merely "human subjects"), as well as responding to certain needs during fieldwork.

SA: Absolutely. I think that were it not for the Lab and having conversations with other scholars from the global South doing research in the global South, I would have felt alone in having to do a lot of legwork before and during field visits. While the value of qualitative research has been discussed by other authors from a decolonial perspective, including some of the challenges scholars face, I think the Lab served as an important forum to discuss challenges that many of my colleagues did not face as they were not working in the global South. Subsequently, conversations in the Lab allowed me to be more reflexive regarding how I presented myself (in the field) and did not re-assert problematic (colonial) narratives of which we are critical in global North institutions. However, I had not been trained in what to look out for in the foundational books often used to teach qualitative methodologies, which I had to learn on the go. For example, prior to going into the field for the first time, I questioned the outfit and accessories I wore, as well as how I would introduce myself to ensure my socioeconomic status would not pressure my participants into believing I wanted a certain set of answers.

Mismatch Between the Research Process Pre-Determined in the Global North, and Fieldwork Realities in the Global South

SS: During the fieldwork for my doctoral studies, my research participants did not care about the research process; they were looking for a practical solution to a problem which

pushed them deeper into poverty with each passing day. They asked if I could "do" something to ensure that their access to the Commons would not be blocked by the powerful, upper-caste landlords in the village. It had taken me two years (including coursework, comprehensive exams, research proposal review, and ethics approval) to get to the field and I was not at liberty to change the direction of my research. I felt quite helpless as I thought about what I could "do." How can one overcome the rigidity of the institutional structures to try and address the actual concerns of the research participants?

NK: When I was researching how the agrarian crisis in Punjab (India) translated into crisis in masculinity at an individual level, the question of whether I could "do" something about the issues my participants were facing also emerged during my fieldwork. The visible disappointment on their faces when I told them that my research might not be directly applicable for policy was heartbreaking, even though most of them were too polite to admit it. Research for the purpose of knowledge production was not enough for them. While knowledge production may be highly rewarded within academia, especially in the global North, participants do not often feel it's worth their or the researcher's own time and effort (their perception is that productive research is action-oriented research).

SA: Prior to going into the field, I had heard from my colleagues about feeling helpless when it comes to not impacting their research population and instead only being bystanders or observers to the sufferings about which they write. I, too, felt this when I would speak with my participants and they would give me a list of troubles they were facing, and asked how I could help them. Sometimes, participants would tell me to take pictures of their homes or themselves as "evidence" that I could use to make their case stronger, assuming again that my research was like a report being read by government officials. Here again, I used to have conversations with them about why keeping their identity confidential by not taking pictures of them or their homes was crucial to their safety. In some rare instances, I would have research participants lose interest when they would find out I could not help them.

Action-Oriented Research

MM: NK, you mention the different perceptions around knowledge production and rewards associated with research, particularly, how participants may value action-oriented research, which is not typically a concern in mainstream academia. Conventional ideas around objectivity and neutrality are still dominating academic research and concurrently what is accepted and taught as research. Would you say little to no education is provided to students on approaches such as action-oriented research, which remains marginalized in many disciplines?

NK: Yes, this is what I mean when I say there is a gap between what we are trained for and what is actually expected of us in the field, especially in the global South. Since the global South has a tradition of emancipatory/participatory action research (Anderson, 2017), such a rift is experienced more forcefully for researchers (such as I) located at the intersections of the research traditions and practices of the global South and global North. The expectations of conforming to hegemonic disciplinary standpoints become particularly problematic when geopolitical hierarchies play into research methods and practices. When research in the global South and global North contrasts, often discordantly, the latter emerges as more valid and dominant due to long standing legacies of colonial/imperial episteme, standpoints, and traditions (see, for example, Bhambra, 2013, 2014; Bhattacharya, 2013; Bhattacharya & Kim, 2020).

From a traditional Western-centric perspective, the goal of qualitative research is to produce knowledge. By that reasoning, emancipatory methods and approaches of the global South are often not considered as legitimate as they stand at the intersections of pedagogy,

research, and activism (Anderson, 2017). The issues of knowledge/method hierarchies, modes of analyses, validation of findings, and choice of theoretical frameworks, then, frequently surface – generally in the direction of criticism towards knowledge/methods situated in/out of the global South or out of indigenous research methodologies.

Lack of Agency for Early Career Scholars

SA: I also think that as early scholars, there is not a lot of agency to question or challenge existing ways of teaching methodology or IRB research, given that I do not have the social or cultural capital to make some of these changes.

MM: I agree with you, SA. It is difficult for certain scholars to change things on their own. Arguably, systemic transformation requires coordinated action with participation and support from more established scholars. There are changes happening, although on a relatively smaller scale. There are researchers combining indigenous and action research methodologies. Consider the notion of "two-eyed seeing," which refers to "the ability to turn a critical eye toward Western knowledge as "situated," "cultural knowledge," and "a simultaneous deconstruction of the dominant paradigm while resurrecting and generating indigenous knowledge" (Evans et al. 2018, p. 271). Have you noted similar changes happening in your particular disciplines, and in research done in the global South?

NK: Yes, there is certainly a shift in methodological approaches used in social science research. Consider, for example, Linda T. Smith's (1999; 2012) remarkable work on decolonizing methodologies and how it transformed research to a more equitable process in social sciences. It played a very significant role in the indigenization of methodological interventions. In this vein, Gurminder Bhambra's (2014) and Julian Go's (2016b) works in pursuit of a global sociology - one that is critical of the Eurocentric nature of the sociological tradition - are also crucial. Research ethics are increasingly challenging the colonizing discourses which reduce real-life participants to mere consumables (e.g., Bhattacharya, 2007, 2016).

In practical terms, however, following Bhattacharya (2016), how do we (researchers) claim solidarity with our participants and include them as stakeholders? For instance, talking about my research (and research similar to mine), there isn't an explicit promise of action or change. How do we justify such research to the participants? Participants might not be able to comprehend (or do not care about) dominant/traditional tools used in academia to evaluate the "quality" of research, such as the opinion of peers, papers published, citations, , et cetera. These endorsements/metrics are for us (researchers) and not the participants. Do the participants owe us knowledge anyway? I could very well say "No" and save our time, but the answer is not that simple. First of all, from where did we get the idea of "giving" and "taking" of knowledge? It all lies in the longstanding colonial/imperial tendencies of the research process which normalized the "taking." Recently, in an effort to compensate for all this "taking," researchers did its complete opposite – "giving." If nothing, at least giving the participants a sense of gratification or monetary compensation. But in light of decolonial discourses, how do we rationalize this give and take?

How do we make sense of research as an equitable phenomenon – something that is not based on simplex flow of knowledge from the participants to the researcher? Why do we assume they owe us the knowledge to "fill the gaps" in literature or to advance our field of study? This question is especially urgent in research that is not explicitly policy-oriented, research that does not present an immediate "solution" to participants'/communities' issues.

SS: NK, you have posed a crucial question – one that can be used as an entry point to practicing reflexivity, particularly by global South scholars trained in the global North. I think the assumption that participants owe knowledge to researchers is a fundamental concept within

the colonizing, extractive research epistemologies and methods developed and practiced in the academe of the global North. This was brought home to me when one of my participants asked, "*Behenji, iske baad kya hoga*?" [Sister, what will happen once the research is over?], which, given the context, I interpreted as, "what will change for us once your research is over?" I was at a loss for words – she was probably not going to be impressed by the dissemination plans laid out in my research proposal, but I managed to say something vague about the significance of such work for the purpose of raising awareness about poverty. Another participant expressed resentment about the absence of changes to the lives of the "researched" even after numerous surveys and data collection exercises: "*Likh likh ke toh khub le jate hain, par hota kuch bhi nahi*" [A lot of people document our problems and take information from us, but nothing ever changes in our lives].

SA: SS, your point is so apt. And yet, in those same spaces, I also find myself trying to figure out what agency I do have to "protect" my research participants to ensure my research does not further exploit them. And this is slightly different than what is talked about in existing qualitative methodologies, because there is an added layer to not reify power structures that historically have been done given the history of colonization in South Asia and how data extraction was used to reify problematic stereotypes, and certainly has been written about (see Lewis, 1973). To be sure, more scholars working in the global South have written fascinating and helpful accounts regarding this. To mind comes Bhattacharya's (2016) work where she talks about having to decide what information of her participants she will share in her writings and publications. This is emotional labor (perhaps postcolonial qualitative research labor?) we must do because we do not want to reinforce the same subjugation and gaze that we criticize Western and/or non-native researchers for doing before us.

MM: NK, from my perspective, the questions that you raise relate to our respective worldviews and whether we have the academic freedom to do research accordingly. Early on in my doctoral studies in Scotland, I undertook a participatory approach to research. I did not go into the field with the intention to do research that will "fill a gap" in the literature but to engage with people in a particular context to address shared interests/concerns. This implied not applying any predetermined framework. I also did not think of the participants owing me any knowledge. I remember being questioned by academic colleagues about how I was conducting the research and why I was not adapting and testing conceptual ideas about which I already knew. I stood my ground back then, but in many ways, I was able to do so because I was familiar with and took part in discussion about action-oriented work being carried out elsewhere. There was also growing recognition for non-positivist qualitative research.

I realize that I might have been in a privileged situation, and that in certain situations, without appropriate support, it is difficult to challenge rigid and prescriptive ideas around research. Doctoral students often face constraints/pressures when it comes to what and how they can or cannot do research, and what is considered legitimate knowledge, methods, and evidence. Tying into what SS said, there is a sort of conditioning that takes place in academia, which the four of us have experienced to some extent. I am not sure though whether that sort of conditioning happens only in the global North. I am reading a chapter on epistemological disruptions by Pirayesh (2019), in which she refers to the global "coloniality of power" that persists within both governing social orders and production of knowledge. Drawing on Quijano (2000), Darder (2018), and Grosfoguel (2011) *inter alia*, she argues that non-Western ways of knowing are "invisibilized" or "destroyed" by epistemological hegemony and the associated colonial form of power that continues to prevail globally (p. 90). This and my own educational experience make me think about knowledge systems and colonial legacies that pervade higher educational institutions in the global South. Dialogical reflexivity in spaces like the Lab may help researchers to understand and start unpacking some of those complexities.

NK: When we think of decolonizing research in practical terms, reflexivity is considered a critical tool (Bhattacharya & Kim, 2020). But in times of need – during critical time in the fieldwork in the global South – do we need something more than just the researcher being reflexive and evaluating her positionality? Looking at the order of things (here, qualitative research methods) from a global South vantage could be helpful but how do we accomplish that? What different insights are afforded from a global South view? Perhaps something similar to the concept of "a social science from below" could prove to be helpful (Go, 2016b, p. 2). As a decolonizing strategy, Go (2016b) calls on social scientists to start with the standpoint of subjugated groups rather than with the standpoint of the metropole as traditional research processes prescribe. He terms it the "Southern Standpoint."

How Inclusive Are Decolonial Discourses and Spaces in Practice?

MM: In my bounded experience, when it comes to discussion around indigenous research (or research with indigenous communities) and decolonizing research, conversations in North America do not tend to include the many voices and experiences of researchers from the global South. The few academics who are originally from the global South or doing work in the global South and who get to participate are typically experienced ones most likely tenured or in tenure-track positions. As an early scholar doing research in the global South, have you been invited to take part in such debates, or do you know many others who have been included? Have you been asked in your respective North American universities about how existing processes may need to change to reflect the realities that you face during your fieldwork in the global South? I am not suggesting that there is a deliberate exclusion, but there is a sense that only a few are welcome in certain discussion spaces and are able to freely express themselves. Others and their valuable experiences are overlooked. This is arguably connected to issues that I mentioned earlier such as privilege, bias, and unequal power relations, which are associated with a lack of equity, diversity, and inclusion in academia.

SA: Emerging decolonizing spaces have yet to create that legitimacy/currency that can allow for global South-based researchers to have the social and/or cultural capital to question hegemonic conventions of qualitative inquiry. In the absence of this, as you said, MM, global North-based institutions and journals legitimize or endorse outdated methodologies that do not reflect critiques by up-and-coming scholars who are either based in global South institutions that are less "elite" or who are still early scholars and do not have the "star power" to challenge these conventions. Furthermore, it should also be noted that many of the sources and availability of funding are colonialist as well, which could make early scholars wary of being critical or at the very least hesitant in the ways they present their criticisms. This can be a tricky position to be in, as with sufficient funding (as well as securing funding from prestigious institutions), early/mid-career researchers could eventually gain enough cultural and social capital to challenge existing paradigms/conventions.

SS: I don't have a well-developed idea in this regard, but I think there might be something to the differences between colonization in the global North and South. Parts of the global North (Australia, Canada, the USA) are dealing with settler colonialism, while most countries in the global South continue to experience colonization through the legacy of colonialism, neoliberal capitalism, and globalization.

MM: I agree. In the global South, governance may still be influenced by colonial structures, but countries (for the most part) are not governed by colonial settlers. In the global North, conversations on decolonization are understandably dominated by people and issues pertaining to settler-colonial contexts, including but not limited to, ongoing intra- and intergenerational indigenous trauma, "colonial guilt," indigenous resistance to colonialism and imperialism, and initiatives towards truth, healing, and reconciliation (Daigle, 2019).

The question remains whether early career researchers from the global South, alongside other colleagues, have real opportunities to exercise their voice, to be visible, to decide and act based on their values and positionalities in the discourses and practices which are taking place and that affect them.

Concluding Reflections

Currently in academia, there is a lack of safe discursive spaces for early career scholars and graduate students where they can be vulnerable and freely express themselves on the basis of trust, reciprocity, mutual respect, and no power imbalances. We, the authors, came together to create such a space through our Qualitative Research Lab – global South. We started the Lab to discuss our experiences of being global South scholars in the global North academy. The conversations that occur amongst us are inspired by and build upon the works of postcolonial and decolonial scholars. In this paper, we have tailored some of our discussions to focus on concerns relating to knowledge production and the reproduction of epistemic inequality in a context where researchers struggle to straddle the divide between philosophy, theory, and methods in the global North and the global South. More specifically, we discuss our perception and interpretation of that divide through our respective positionalities and offer insights into the challenges it poses. In doing so, we ponder the lack of agency over the choice or availability of theory/methods for graduate students especially when IRBs try to assert the boilerplate process/practices of conducting research in the global North.

Our goal is to ultimately address the gaps in theory and methods, especially when there is an attempt to transfer theory from the global North and an expectation of it being automatically translated into methodology in the global South. This simplex one-way flow of knowledge and guidelines in research methods is problematic as it evades the practical, subtle challenges that a researcher trained in the global North must face in the field in the global South.

Our experience of creating and developing the lab indicates that more discursive spaces are needed for early career researchers and graduate students to not only engage in theoretical discussions around decolonization, but also to unpack the practicalities of using decolonial frameworks to design and conduct research in the global South. Although the initial intention of being a part of the lab was to share our experiences as scholars doing qualitative research in the global South, the Lab has over the years served as an important space where we get to unpack our experiences of being in academia overall. The Lab serves as a space to support one another including sharing job opportunities and research ideas, and giving and receiving community feedback, which may not be as easily accomplished in spaces where hierarchies exist.

Some might argue that the idea of yet another "lab" or space is of little account since there already exist numerous labs and groups that provide such spaces. However, the main issues with most of them are the requirement of institutional affiliation, association subscription, conference participation, physical presence, and such. While these spaces are certainly valuable, we wanted an equitable, humble, free-for-all, virtual space which would welcome early career researchers and graduate students irrespective of their institution, geographic location, field of study, et cetera. Through this article, we invite more early career researchers and graduate students in similar positions to us to participate in our discussions and open up more spaces.

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