



Moving beyond Poststructural Paralysis: Articulating an Ethic of Diaspora Collaboration

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Abstract

Scholars in African higher education agree on the importance of collaboration with scholars in the diaspora. Despite this agreement, two major obstacles affect the implementation of collaboration: the politics of identity and difference and the common view of ethics as power. Literature on diaspora and collaborations tends to gloss over fundamental issues on the ethics of collaborations. In this article I reflect on how these two points of paralysis can be overcome by adopting an African humanist ethic that can drive the building of functional institutions to foster collaboration between and among scholars in Africa and those in diaspora. The article argues that in order to contribute to meaningful development in Africa, scholars need to move beyond the politics of identity and ethics as oppressive power.

Keywords: diaspora, Africa, higher education, poststructuralism, collaboration, ethics

Résumé

Les savants dans l'enseignement supérieur africain, conviennent de l'importance de la collaboration avec les savants de la diaspora. Malgré cet accord, deux grands obstacles affectent la mise en œuvre de la collaboration : les politiques de l'identité et de la différence et la conception commune de l'éthique en tant que pouvoir. La littérature sur la diaspora et la collaboration a tendance à minimiser les questions fondamentales sur l'éthique de la collaboration. Dans cet article, je réfléchis à la façon dont ces deux entraves peuvent être surmontées en adoptant une éthique humaniste africaine qui peut motiver l'établissement d'institutions fonctionnelles pour encourager la collaboration entre les savants en Afrique et ceux de la diaspora. Cet article fait valoir que pour contribuer au développement véritable de l'Afrique, les savants doivent dépasser la politique de l'identité et de l'éthique en tant que pouvoir oppressif.

Mots-clés : diaspora, Afrique, enseignement supérieur, poststructuralisme, collaboration, éthique

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Introduction

The power of the global diaspora is a critical issue in African higher education. According to Aikins and White (2011), education is one of the strategies through which states can draw from the diaspora. An important aspect of the diaspora in education is the debate on how to facilitate collaboration and tap resources from the diaspora for local higher education in Africa. The general attitude, however, toward the political economy of diaspora involvement in African higher education institutions seems to be one of ambivalence. As Mahroum (2001) indicates, diaspora collaboration raises ethical questions of competition for a skilled workforce due to brain drain and brain gain. The concept of the diaspora adds to this uncertainty because of its negative connotation of forced resettlement of groups of people. When it comes to scholars in Africa collaborating with scholars in the diaspora, ethical issues raised by power and intellectual and cultural differences have been major causes of concern.

Nonetheless, an ethic of collaboration¹ is important but it can also create roadblocks to achieving set goals. The importance of ethics in collaborations comes from the need for equitable, fair and just projects that produce a common good. The major challenge with an ethic of collaboration is how to find a common mechanism to achieve the common good. This has, to a certain extent, resulted in abandoning discussions about ethics and avoiding diasporic collaboration among African scholars altogether. Diaspora collaboration with local scholars is avoided in African higher education because of the entrenchment of poststructuralism as a prevailing intellectual ethic in academia.² For instance, the poststructural ethic as it affects diaspora collaborations was shown by Ho, Boyle and Yeoh (2015), who question policies that view diaspora actors as having essentially pragmatic and instrumental efforts to incubate, reinforce, connect and transfer resources from/through diaspora territories to homelands. They argue that diaspora strategies are ethically problematic because they take the diaspora–homeland relationship as utilitarian. The ethic of collaboration that they propose, however, is exactly what might limit collaboration. They advocate for a feminist care ethic to nurture collaborative relationships for the public good (Ho et al. 2015). I will demonstrate that this cultural politics of identity and view of power in collaboration does little to promote collaboration as it emphasises the divisive ethic of difference, an unnecessary paralysis that comes with poststructuralist scepticism.

Kagan's (1991) definition of collaboration, although she used it in a different educational context, can serve better to describe what I mean by diaspora collaborations. She refers to it as organisational and inter-organisational structures where resources, power and authority are shared and where people are brought together to achieve common goals that could

not be accomplished by a single individual or organisation independently (Kagan 1991). The key issues here are decentralisation of power, authority and structures to accomplish common goals. Examples of objectives of local African scholars and those in diaspora collaboration include: exchange of scientific information; exchange of personnel such as scientists and technical staff for training under the projects; combined accomplishment of project goals; and organisation of education sessions, scientific meetings, symposia, seminars, workshops and conferences to identify, understand or deal with critical problems (Ionescu 2006). General observation, however, shows that usually these goals do not play out in neutral ways. The exchange can be stated as follows: local collaborators provide information while the diaspora partner extracts information from locals. Diaspora scholars provide technical and scientific staff, while the local African scholars are recipients. It is this understanding of power differentials in collaborations that makes it challenging for scholars to move forward with meaningful projects.

In this article, I argue that two major problems have paralysed collaborations and partnerships between African scholars and those in the diaspora. To elaborate this problem further, this article conceptualises two stumbling blocks that obstruct the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa's (CODESRIA) diaspora support initiative and its desire to promote collaboration: the stumbling block of seeing ethics and knowledge as power, and the stumbling block of a culture of politics of identity. I address each of these in turn. This article asks: Can collaboration be conceptualised beyond these roadblocks? If so, what kind of ethic follows from such a rethinking? The article suggests a way of moving forward by adopting an ethics of ubuntu in collaboration.

Stumbling Block of Cultural Politics of Identity and Difference

Who is a scholar in the diaspora? How does one become a scholar in the diaspora? Is the diaspora gendered? How long does one continue to be in the diaspora? What ethical values do those in the diaspora follow? All these questions arise in defining a multifaceted reality of diaspora, a term that is riddled with cultural, political, economic, social, religious and identity differences. Disputes and conflict that arise from these issues make the diaspora ethic of collaboration a complicated one. Ionescu (2006) shows this stumbling block first by noting that there is no single accepted definition³ of the term 'diaspora'; neither is there legal recognition of the term, which has consequently given rise to many different meanings and interpretations. The term 'diaspora' conveys multiple, complicated characteristics that raise many issues, among them:

- The idea of transnational populations living in a host land while still maintaining relations with their homelands;
- Different ways countries refer to their 'diasporas': nationals abroad, permanent immigrants, citizen of X origin living abroad, non-resident of X origin, persons of X origin, expatriates, transnational citizens;
- Issues of time, place of birth and citizenship, as well as subtle questions of identity and belonging (e.g. when does a 'migrant' cease to be one and become part of the 'diaspora?');
- Identity and belonging: being part of a diaspora implies a sense of identification with a group or the feeling of belonging to a certain identity; and
- Symbolic inclusion and actual inclusion (legislative and institutional realities).

The concept of diaspora unravels even further when concepts of higher education and Africa are attached to it. It is still unclear what one would refer to when talking about the African academic diaspora. This conceptualisation has a direct impact on the formulation of academic institutional policies of collaboration. It is precisely for this reason that Zeleza (2010) states that the incorporation of very different groups in a common identity addressed as 'diaspora' may lead to a dilution of the concept. Although Ionescu (2006) and Zeleza (2010) highlight the contextual dimension of diaspora collaboration and call for flexible definitions that take into account both concrete (citizenship, length of stay, rights) and intangible matters (feeling of identity, perceptions and trust), they do not fully address the question of ethics. Under what ethical framework would diaspora–local collaborations operate?

The question of ethics brings to the fore another set of complexities that can explain the problems African scholars face in instituting collaboration with the diaspora. Most of what we know today about ethics and their implications comes from Western philosophy. Aristotle, for example, thought of ethics in the form of virtue. He divided virtue into two kinds: moral virtue and intellectual virtue. These typologies are crucial in discussing collaboration because they highlight the complicated link between individual and group ethical acts. Apart from considering virtue in general, Aristotle also considered the particular moral or ethical virtues of courage, temperance and justice. In addition, he dealt at length with such characteristics as liberality, magnificence, pride and ambition. Aristotle also created a separate category of virtues: art, prudence, science, understanding (intuition) and wisdom.

Plato, however, did not distinguish between moral and intellectual virtues. He suggested four cardinal virtues: courage, temperance, justice and wisdom. Of these, Aristotle regarded the first three as moral virtues and the fourth as an intellectual virtue. What we learn from Aristotle and Plato is that ethics can be looked at in multiple ways. For example, we can focus on individual or group ethics and how they interrelate for the common good. From other scholars of ethics and philosophy of law and jurisprudence, such as Kant, Hegel, Lacan and Marx, we learn about the complexity of ethics, their variability and arbitrariness.

Although there is a general acknowledgement of the contested nature of ethical approaches, very little consideration has been given to alternative ethical thought. It is important to point out, as succinctly stated by Molefi Kete Asante (1987), that Western standards of science, politics, culture and, most importantly, ethics have been imposed as interpretative measures on other cultures, making collaboration even among African scholars difficult. Asante (1987) rightly observes that proponents of the logic of scientific discovery as a leading intellectual thought on several topics, ethics included, are reductionist and often incapable of adequately dealing with a broad range of subjects of collaboration. He emphasises the need for an accommodating, flexible frame of ethics that permits this dynamic. He proposes using Afrocentricity (the theory of social change), which denotes the Afrocentric study of African concepts, issues, behaviours and problems. Afrocentricity involves the systematic exploration and consideration of relationships, social codes, cultural and commercial customs, and oral traditions and proverbs. It also includes interpretation of communicative behaviours as expressed in discourse, spoken or written, and music. Afrology, it may be inferred from Asante (1987), deals with the variability and contested nature of ethics by focusing on three postures that one can take with respect to the human condition: feeling, knowing and acting. Afrology recognises these three stances as interrelated, not separate. As exemplified by Plato and Aristotle in European or Western approaches to ethics, these are normally recognised as affective, cognitive and conative. According to Asante (1987), the affective component deals with a person's feelings, of liking or disliking, about an object or idea. The cognitive refers to how an object is perceived and its conceptual connotation. Conative is the person's behavioural tendencies regarding an object. The importance of Afrology to ethics in collaboration is that it calls for a rejection of a totalising and oppressive ethic that devalues anything non-Western.

While taking an Afrocentric approach may help deal with the issues of Western ethics as a dominant guideline, it does not solve the problem of variability and the contested nature of ethics in collaboration. Reinhold

Niebuhr's (1932) contribution to social theory explains this quandary better than most. In his book *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, he argues against the moralistic idea that good individuals filled with love for others and driven by ethical characteristics and virtue could change the world and enable justice to prevail and hence promote effective collaboration. Rather, he asserts that nations or people, which in this case can refer to institutions and their actors driving collaborations, are concerned with power and control and thus are motivated by selfish interests. In politically contested environments people strive for what may appear to be justice for them but not for others, which makes collaboration a challenging endeavour. While this observation might be true, it is crucial to point out that even prominent cultural appraisers of injustice such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Marcus Garvey, Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, among many others, still believed in the possibility and potential of people to act kindly, justly and ethically and saw the need to harness the collaboration potential between local and diasporic Africans. In actual fact, Niebuhr believed in the goodness of people and love fostering justice or ethical acts, but recognised the difficulty of achieving this in the context of powerful institutions and nations.

The impediments of the cultural politics of identity and difference, at least as they may relate to the current problem of collaboration, are better articulated by Cornel West (1990) in 'The New Cultural Politics of Difference'. Martín Alcoff's (2011) article 'An Epistemology for the Next Revolution' made similar observations. Both West and Martín Alcoff suggest that identity politics has entangled scholars in a tornado of identities that make it nearly impossible to find common ground towards a struggle for liberation. West (1990:19) describes the entanglement as follows:

The distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogenous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing. Needless to say, these gestures are not new in the history of criticism or art, yet what makes them novel – along with the cultural politics they produce – is how and what constitutes difference, the weight and gravity it is given in representation and the way in which highlighting issues like extremism, empire, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, nation, and region at this historical moment acknowledges some discontinuity and disruption from previous forms of cultural critique.

In no other area than feminist critiques of social reality has this polarisation in collaboration been observed so well. Haraway (1991:154), a prominent feminist scholar, articulates this observation succinctly:

It has become so difficult to name one's feminism by a single adjective or even to insist in every circumstance upon the noun. Consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute. Identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic. With the hard-won recognition of their social and historical constitution, gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for belief in 'essential' unity.

What this means, for example, is that there is nothing about being scholars, either from Africa or from the diaspora, that one can imagine to naturally bind them together under the same ethical construct.

Lemert (1999) highlights eight important conceptions of postmodern epistemology that have to a great extent characterised current intellectual thought, which, as I argue, has made it hard for collaboration among African and diaspora scholars. These are:

- Understanding current transitions in epistemological terms or as dissolving epistemology altogether;
- Focusing upon the centrifugal tendencies of current social transformations and their dislocating character;
- Seeing the self as dissolved or dismembered by the fragmenting of experiences;
- Arguing for the contextuality of truth claims or seeing them as 'historical';
- Theorising powerlessness which individuals feel in the face of globalising tendencies;
- Seeing the 'emptying' of day-to-day life as a result of the intrusion of abstract systems;
- Regarding coordinated political engagement as precluded by the primary or contextual and dispersal; and
- Defining postmodernity as the end of epistemology, the individual and, most importantly, ethics.

These foundational precepts of postmodernist thought have, on a positive note, been credited with changing international development and academia. Theories on capacity development and partnerships (collaborations), for instance, which were originally developed to understand and improve North–South cooperation, stress the importance of contextualisation and ownership. This has transformed homogenous university institutions into ones of multiple colours, thoughts, methods, disciplines and ethics founded on diversity and difference (Martín Alcoff 2011). No longer, therefore, can partnerships or collaboration be driven by one dominant and oppressive ethic. An excellent example of this major change within the

academy is in the form of demands for an ethic of liberatory scholarship produced through the creation and institutionalisation of partnership and collaborations of inquiry in women's and gender and sexuality studies, racial and ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, disability studies, diaspora studies and others. However, what is critical is that over time, as West (1990), Haraway (1991), Lemert (1999) and Martín Alcoff (2011) have shown, we have witnessed a slow erosion of the unity that grounded the various collaborations demanding meaningful change. Although various groups of people agree and know the importance of dealing with issues of poverty, war, disease and climate change, we still lack an ethic of cooperation to deal with these challenges meaningfully, especially in the African higher education sector. Martín Alcoff (2011:77) states that:

The intellectual basis for the demand to decolonize the academy has been eroded by sceptical, postmodern philosophies that have called into question the founding terms such as humanism, identity, progress, truth, and liberation. Postmodernism is a movement that I would credit with opening up new ways to diagnose the causes of oppression and to critique domination, but it has also resulted, particularly in the humanities, in a demoralization and confusion about what unites our diverse constituencies, what language we can use to make demands, and what vision we are working toward, just as it has called into question the ability to invoke any 'we' here at all.

West's (1990) and Martín Alcoff's (2011) insight is crucial for thinking about diaspora and African collaboration in higher education as they assert that identity politics are always thought of as divisive and undesirable in collaboration. Martín Alcoff, like West, questions claims about the divisiveness and undesirability of identity politics. Such a monolithic rejection of identity politics, I argue, is a major impediment to an ethic of collaboration that needs to be avoided. Martín Alcoff shows that there is simply not sufficient evidence for the absoluteness with which the critics of identity politics have assumed that strongly felt identities always tend toward separatism. For collaboration to happen there is a strong need to move past this intellectual tradition and embrace a new ethic of collaboration in African higher education. Moving forward, scholars must move beyond the usually false dualisms that, for example, see all men, Western scholars or scholars in the diaspora as the oppressive other that cannot be ethically trusted or collaborated with. While valuing the disciplines, identities and multiple epistemological differences in African higher education, there is a strong need to move beyond these imaginary boundaries to institute real and effective collaboration practices. This is what Kagan (1989) has expressed as the limits of morality.

In his seminal essay 'The African Academic Diaspora in the United States and Africa: The Challenges of Productive Engagement', Zeleza (2004) demonstrates this poststructural paralysis that makes it difficult to forge an ethic of collaboration. In the essay, he shows the institutional, intellectual, ideological and individual nuances that can be manifested in a diasporic collaboration process. He shows this using history and contemporary diasporic trends in academic knowledge production and linkages with Africa. The essay makes four key points. It begins by trying to define the diaspora to distinguish between dispersal and diaspora and the historic and contemporary diasporas and the connections between them. The second point he makes is to contextualise the academic diaspora to show the institutional, intellectual, ideological and individual dynamics of diasporic knowledge production. Third, he shows how history connected the diasporic academic interface during and after the colonial era in Africa. The fourth point he makes is to question types of the contemporary African academic diaspora. In a true poststructuralist sense, as West (1990) and Martín Alcoff (2011) have shown, Zeleza (2004) historicises, dismantles, differentiates and dehomogenises the diaspora as a concept, process, people, identity, activities and status in relation to collaboration in higher education to show its dynamism and complexity. While helpful in many ways, his analysis makes it almost impossible to think of an ethic of diaspora collaboration as it hardly suggests how amidst these differences a pragmatic strategy could be drawn to institute an ethic of collaboration.

Stumbling Block of an Ethic of Knowledge and Power

Other than the cultural politics of difference, the discourse on power, knowledge and ethics has hampered collaborations between scholars in Africa and the diaspora. The prevailing analysis of knowledge and ethics as variable and conflicting may also be associated with the postmodernist view of reality. This overzealous exposure of so-called multiple truths, variable ethics and superfluous power by Jacques Derrida, Bruno Latour and Michel Foucault, to mention only a few, has significantly impacted the intellectual work of African scholars, especially regarding collaborations. Latour's actor-network theory complicates our understanding of power in collaboration. It exposes a major weakness in Foucault's framing of power, namely, that non-human objects can exercise power over such a group of human action. Of course, some scholars have highlighted, for instance, the influence of technology in facilitating collaborations and diaspora initiatives. As Foucault took the human/non-human object divide for granted, it is a known fact that this

also applies to most social and relational analysis today. Foucault's French compatriots Latour's and Michel Callon's insistence on non-humans as actors suggests that the ethic of diaspora and local African scholar collaboration is an even more complicated process. If the cultural politics of difference makes it so hard to think of a unity of purpose among scholars as actors, the addition of non-human actors leads to further paralysis of an ethic of diaspora collaboration. How do scholars begin to put in place an ethic of collaboration for non-human actors if they find it impossible to find common ground with human beings?

In the analysis of power as knowledge in human relations and institutions, Foucault (1979) suggests that the objective is not to analyse or understand certain forms of knowledge, in our case the ethics of diaspora collaboration, in terms of repression or law, but in terms of a network of relationships which can be seen or unseen, recognised or unrecognised. Foucault (1979) defined power first by explaining the negation of what he meant by 'power'. He viewed power not as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state. Foucault also repudiated seeing power as a subjugation which in contrast to violence has the form of the rule. He also did not consider power as the domination of one group over the other. Foucault thought that it was mistaken to assume that the sovereignty of the state, the form of law or the overall unity of a domination was clearly spelled out. Rather, he argued that:

Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. Power's condition of possibility, or in any case the viewpoints which permit one to understand its exercise, even in the more 'peripheral' effects, and which also make it possible to use its mechanism as a grid of intelligibility of the social order, must not be sought in the primary existence of a central power, . . . : power is not an institution, and not a structure, neither is it certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (Foucault 1979:92)

Foucault's (1979) brilliant critique of central power has opened the possibility for many scholars to think critically about the complicated nature of the power dynamics imbued in collaborations and ethics of collaborating.

Foucault's ideas and those of many that followed in his wake have directly or indirectly influenced various methodological, epistemological and ethical approaches that scholars in Africa and the diaspora have heavily drawn from. The social sciences and humanities have been heavily influenced by Foucault's ideas. While not openly referencing Foucault or Latour, Meyer (2001) draws on evidence of case studies on intellectual diaspora networks. His paper tries to show that highly skilled expatriate networks, through a connectionist approach linking diaspora members with their countries of origin, turn the brain drain into a brain gain. His argument is that these persons and groups of diaspora provide original information that questions conventional human capital-based assumptions. He argues that the idea of network opens interesting perspectives for understanding and managing global skills' circulation. Like Foucault's explanation of power being diffuse, he suggests an expanded version of the network approach, referring to actors and intermediaries, of which diaspora traditional kinship ties are part, showing a systematic associative dynamic. While this network approach offers a more interesting way to look at diaspora collaboration, it does not offer a unified ethic of diaspora collaboration other than just showing that a network analysis of diaspora can revert brain drain into brain gain. Having analysed the wide network of actors, how then do we begin to initiate a collaborative ethic? Is it necessary and possible to think of such an ethic?

Foucault states that 'power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective' (1979:93). Thinking of ethics as power similarly presupposes that an ethic of collaboration is driven by objectives and that these objectives are cross-cutting and apply to all involved. Often the challenge within collaborations, especially between African scholars and those from other distant places, be it of African origin or otherwise, is that partners are always ensnared in a form of battle that seeks to identify whose ethics matter and whose ethical principles should count. Usually, we tend to think of scholars from the diaspora in Western institutions as having a just, legally binding and more democratic ethic of collaboration while those in Africa are seen as unjust, corrupt and autocratic. While this might sometimes be the case, it is important to state that what is ethical, good or bad is usually value laden. Therefore, it is very hard to decide which ethical approach to follow and it is itself engulfed in ethical questions. It is usually in this context that one sees the challenge with the current intellectual and epistemological frameworks that drive collaborations of Africans and scholars in the diaspora. This critical awareness of the power of ethics and the sources of ethical practices of collaboration threatens to stifle the quest for collaboration as people get ensnared in the analysis of power. Suffice to

say that in forging collaborations, we ought to take more seriously Asante's (1987:11) Afrological view that 'any interpretation of African culture must begin at once to dispense with the notion that, in all things, Europe is teacher and Africa is pupil'. It does not automatically follow that by being a scholar from the diaspora one is imbued with virtues, morals and an ethic that will make a successful collaboration. At the same time, it does not help to spend energy framing and deciding where power comes from, what we call it and what language to use in framing a collaboration.

Foucault (1979) highlights another important point when thinking about power which may result in misunderstanding ethics as power, hence affecting the drive for collaborations. He states that 'where there is power there is resistance, and yet or consequently, this resistance is never in apposition of exteriority in relation to power' (1979:92). As stated previously, resistance to ethics in collaborations can be due to a number of factors, which may include: lack of clear guidelines, loopholes in codes of conduct, unfamiliarity with social and cultural practices or outright rejection for the sake of rejection. Foucault's elaborations of this nature of resistance to power caution against thinking of power as a mere winner takes all in a zero-sum game of control. This is important in understanding ethics as power in collaborations because of what he calls the relational character of power. As is true for power, ethics can indeed be resisted and more often than not ignored and outright bleached. This equally applies to collaborations where resistance to ethics can take many forms. Foucault points out that resistance to power, just like resistance to ethical conduct, is present everywhere in the power-ethics nexus. He states that there is no single locus of great refusal. Instead, there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case.

A misinterpretation of this view then often leads to questioning why ethics should matter in collaborations since we know that there is no central authority to enforce ethics and that these efforts may be outright resisted. Understanding ethics in collaboration as power, with multiple and plural points of resistance, allows us to realise the challenges that come with ethical behaviour. One such challenge is choosing a unilaterally agreed upon framework to follow in the process of collaboration. It also allows us to realise that such a framework does not have to come from one source. Various partners can be sources of resistance – founder, parent institutions, owners of institutions, local collaborators and those in the diaspora. This awareness, therefore, moves actors to realise various points of resistance and move towards targeting the exact places where the particular obstacle to ethical approaches might arise. Similarly, varying points of power or resistance should help to level the playing field by engaging all partners

in a collaborative project. This is particularly critical in trying to avoid collaborations that tend to view some group of collaborators, especially those from the diaspora, as more readily transparent, accountable, ethical and better knowing, resourced and more technically savvy than their local counterparts. Collaborations that tend to position one partner as better than the other already raise ethical questions for the common good.

Although the power–knowledge–network analysis is important in thinking about the ethics of diaspora collaboration, Hartsock (1987) shows us how this postmodernist worldview of diffused power and micro politics might weaken the basis for collaborative action. She highlights how postmodernism, as represented by Foucault and others, tends to weaken the political action of collaboration that seeks to fight injustice because it merely ends at the level of analysis. She adds that postmodern theories' understanding of power does not provide adequate guidance on how to end injustices. This therefore puts African collaborators in a fix. The problems facing Africa today, like in the rest of the world, are enormous: HIV/AIDS, access to basic and higher education, housing, infrastructure, food security, climate change, and many others. To support Hartsock's point, there has been a lot of discussion about these problems at an analysis level but very little action and change has been put in place to end injustice and suffering. Scholars in Africa and those in the diaspora have used higher education as a platform to debate these issues. While efforts have been made in some places to use diaspora and local scholars, including students, there is opportunity to do much more beyond mere academic criticism. Hartsock's Marxist perspective suggests that we need to move beyond this analysis of power, ethics, class, gender, diaspora and so on and start to act to bring about real change. Her pertinent call is that we should take off our philosopher hoods and gowns and put on plumbers' boots and gloves and engage in the common fight for change. While our cultures, identities, politics, nationalities, scholarships, disciplines, epistemologies, methodologies and diaspora histories might be different, contested, partial and multiple, we ought to create a common ethic of collaboration that will bring about real change.

Community-Engaged Scholarship in Malawi Public Universities: A Case of Roadblocks in Collaboration

Case study research provides adequate evidence of this paralysis and lack of action in collaboration between local scholars and those in the diaspora. Here I draw on my personal experiences and my own research conducted in Malawi while studying at an institution of higher learning in the diaspora.

Although my study did not aim to specifically examine collaboration between local African scholars and those in the diaspora, the research findings provide evidence on how the politics of identity and the power–knowledge interpretation impact collaboration in African universities. Between 2013 and 2014, I conducted a study of community-engaged scholarship in Malawian public universities. I used a survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews with 115 faculty members in three public universities. I was interested to learn what drives and motivates faculty to conduct community-engaged scholarship. The latter was defined as the strategic collaboration of African faculty with local, international or global community partners to solve real problems of different kinds. What I discovered was emblematic of the two barriers I have discussed here: the stumbling block of the cultural politics of identity, and the lack of initiative to confront the injustices in a unified and concerted way due to some fixed power–knowledge nexus interpretations.

Although faculty members had various interesting projects in their local communities, ranging from water management, reproductive health and agricultural production to education and legal projects, they were mostly limited in scope. Faculty members pointed out that socioeconomic issues, the pressure for promotion and advancing their academic careers and discipline were some of the driving factors for collaborating with local and international communities.

What characterised most of these projects, however, was a strong mistrust of the university and international donor institutions. This mistrust was primarily due to universities not offering adequate funding for community engagement and research. Funding for major projects depended on international donors. At the same time, universities and donor institutions were seen as interlocked in a complicated power chain, with faculty caught in this inescapable power gridlock in which partners fought for scarce resources. Most importantly, faculty members pointed out that integrating various stakeholder powers and unifying them towards one particular action of change was the most difficult thing to do. Even within the universities, although some faculty members managed to forge some interdisciplinary projects in collaboration with various scholars in the diaspora, it was a challenge for faculty to operate from their departments due to differences in methods and approaches in the different disciplines, as well as issues of accountability and academic transparency. Faculty members also pointed out that it was challenging to win the trust of specific interest groups in the context of identity politics. This was made complex because donors funding community-engaged projects preferred basic science over humanities. Worse still, searching for funds was a real challenge as faculty members had to justify their projects by focusing on one specific

group, such as women or children (Nkhoma 2014). Moreover, there was a conspicuous absence of any systematic collaboration between scholars in Africa and others in the diaspora working on implementing social change through community engagement. In terms of challenges in conducting community-engaged scholarship, faculty highlighted the sense of powerlessness due to the globalising tendencies of funding regimes, considering that they had to look outward to big funding organisations and institutions for support, expertise, resources and collaborators for their projects, which were nonetheless not forthcoming. These findings are supported by studies in other countries that looked at the role of the diaspora in home country education sectors. Studies of diaspora involvement in their countries show that although they combine capabilities from different backgrounds, they continue to distinguish between home and host country, as theories on transnationalism suggest (see Faist 2010; Guo 2013; Vertovec 2010).

These observations raise a number of critical questions as we think about promoting an ethic of collaboration between African scholars and those in the diaspora. What strategies, then, can faculty in Africa use to go beyond identity politics and deal with these diffuse power differentials? What ethics might be helpful and useful in a new approach? The postmodernist view of the ethics of identity and cultural difference and knowledge as power, with multiple loci of control, ought not to merely end in paralysis. Instead, this understanding, informed by a nuanced perspective from various epistemologies, such as standpoint theories of power and ethics, should propel us to seek a new unifying epistemology of the ethics of collaboration. We should not give up on the human cause based on discourse and language. While language and the concepts it constitutes have brought out an oppressive history, we can also draw from the same power to constitute a revolutionary collaboration for the common good. These new frontiers of collaboration will make African higher education humanistic and ethical. I now move on to suggest adopting ubuntu as an ethic of collaboration as a way to overcome the barriers of cultural politics of identity and the assumption of ethics and collaborations as mere hotbeds of bureaucratic power.

Ubuntu as an Ethic of Diaspora Collaboration

What should African and diaspora scholars do? While no one framework is best positioned to resolve the dilemmas this article has highlighted, it is important to propose an alternative ethic that African-based scholars can draw from in collaborating with those in the diaspora. One interesting ethic of collaboration that applies to various sectors and would help strengthen diaspora collaboration is ubuntu (humanity). The ubuntu ethic, when applied

to collaboration in an education setting, presupposes a mutually dependent link involving various actors and the community at large (Muxe Nkondo 2007). Individuals are finite beings, an end in and of themselves; yet, they are also a crucial part of the community and the educational set-up in which they live and thrive. The community might include immediate and distant family members, neighbours, clan and larger society (Coetzee and Roux 2004; Musopole 1994). Ubuntu as an ethic of cooperation also promotes awareness to human and non-human actors. While individuals have an important role, the institutions in which they operate should move beyond divisive diversity frameworks to facilitate collaboration among scholars in the diaspora and Africa.

The matrix of the ubuntu ethic of collaboration contains the primary elements of ubuntu, which include: sharing, sympathy, empathy, tolerance, caring, compassion, solidarity, sensitivity to the needs of others, warmth, understanding and acts of kindness (Prinsloo 1998). While acknowledging that these elements are innumerable, major elements of an ubuntu-based collaboration system would thus encompass factors like communication, consultation, compromise, cooperation, camaraderie, conscientiousness and compassion, with a view to bridging diverse academic views or cultures as an ethic of reciprocity (Mbeki 2006; Chiwoza, 2010).

Strategies in education collaboration with the diaspora, such as research, conferences, seminars, evaluation, projects and others, must be driven by such an ethic for real collaboration to happen. Ubuntu also provides an important way of solving the identity politics and the paralysis over power relations. This is in some part rooted in the concept of forgiveness. This is very important in diaspora relations, which have usually been caused by despotic governments, wars and corruption. While it is acknowledged that other kinds of diasporic movements are positively self-induced and driven by a desire to seek new opportunities, the majority of African diaspora academics were forced out of their home countries because of war, discrimination or violence. Thus, scholars and collaborators come to these relationships with negative memories, mistrust and histories of oppression that need to be dealt with if a real ethic of collaboration is to be forged. Suffice to repeat and emphasise forgiveness, not forgetfulness. This is the initiative that drove, for example, the truth and reconciliation movement in South Africa after the fall of the white supremacist regime. What the ethic of ubuntu did for South Africa was to acknowledge the power differences and multiple identities and horrendous historical acts that came about with the oppression of women, Africans and black people, and to establish a new approach to collaboration through building forgiveness and a background for working together.

This is not to naively suggest that ubuntu is an easy fix of the long list of horrible events and problems historically facing our communities. Rather, ubuntu offers a framework within which African scholars and those in the diaspora can cooperate to deal with the problems that threaten our very existence and avoid being snared by the divisive philosophies of difference and power. By dealing with the evils of the past and instituting a way forward, ubuntu offers a platform for change, not just mere analysis of oppression and continuing with things as they have always been. As noted, diaspora as a concept referring to a group of people is itself problematic. It encompasses a broad range of people who find themselves out of their homelands for various reasons that warrant their valid distrust of returning or collaborating with the people and places they regard as responsible for the challenges they face. With ubuntu as an ethic of cooperation and forgiveness, a peaceful resolution of the past can propel people in the diaspora to reconnect and contribute to solving African problems, especially in higher education and development.

Ubuntu is centred on trust. Due to various academic worldviews and policies, negative perceptions can be real obstacles to diaspora collaboration in African higher education development, given that bitterness, suspicion, reluctance, resentment, stigmatisation or discrimination can arise equally within the diaspora and the home country or governments. With an ubuntu ethic of collaboration, trust is strengthened through positive communication and through particular measures responding to academic diaspora requests (academic freedom, citizenship rights, property rights, telecommunication infrastructure development, etc.). Establishing dialogue through media, virtual networks, websites and visits to diasporas, as well as building a common agenda with diasporas through regular meetings and visits, requires trust and positive communication. However, symbolic inclusion through dialogue and communication needs to be backed up by real inclusion through rights and partnerships; technical arrangements might not be sufficient to build trust and collaboration. These measures will help to overcome the identity walls and power differentials.

Conclusion

Martín Alcoff (2011) rightly invokes the need for a new epistemology of liberation. I concur and equally call for a new ethic of collaboration between and among scholars in Africa and the diaspora. I have argued that this ethic of collaboration must be able to address truth and the normative project of improving the production of knowledge projects aimed at the common good of humanity. Moreover, the normative project itself requires a rearticulating of the relationship between identity, power and knowledge. If we are to

establish that our identities and positions of power make an ethically relevant difference, we must be able to articulate why and how this can be so, yet not abandon collaboration or an ethic of collaboration. Local African scholars and those in the diaspora have so much to offer to higher education, not just in Africa but across the globe. Most significantly, there is, of course, a need to take seriously this reality and act upon it, knowing, as Jürgen Habermas (1976) famously pointed out, that knowledge, and indeed our perception and views of what is ethical or not, is vested with human interest, but the emancipation of all actors, human and non-human, is the most profound.

Collaborations driven by a humanistic ethic should offer a strong foundation for African scholars and those in the diaspora to tackle the problems facing our societies today. In their book *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) emphasise the importance of institutions in nation-building. The importance of institutions cannot be understated in cultivating an ethic of collaboration between African scholars and those in the diaspora. While various institutions promoting collaboration exist, promoting a unity of purpose and collaboration among scholars in the diaspora will need deliberate efforts to create new institutions that will lead to such work. I foresee such institutions based in various locations in Africa promoting a mandate of diaspora collaboration. CODESRIA has pushed for an agenda for diaspora collaboration. I suggest that it is time we create research institutes, think tanks, universities, companies and international non-governmental organisations staffed and operated by both locals and African diasporas to deal with various issues facing our communities. Only when such institutions are created can we begin to build an action-oriented humanist ethic of diaspora collaborations.

Notes

1. Ethics in this article refers to a combination of: (i) moral principles that govern a person's or group's behaviour. Synonyms: moral code, morals, morality, values, rights and wrongs, principles, ideals, standards (of behaviour), value system, virtues, dictates of conscience; and (ii) the knowledge that deals with moral principles.
2. For more on poststructuralism, see Lemert (1999). He credits Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and others for the development of this intellectual tradition that has dominated academia. He points out that one should take seriously key statements that Derrida made in the 1960s which marked the central critique of modernity and the inflow of poststructural thought that focused on difference (which I argue may be contributing to the multiplicity of ethics and even distrust of ethics in collaboration in African higher education). Some of the phrases he highlights are 'absence of center', 'language invades the universal

problematic' and 'a system of difference'. Without diving deeply into Derrida's deconstruction theory, it is fair to say that scholars today and the activities they undertake, in this case collaboration, have taken seriously the three Ds: discourse, decentring and differences. Thus, in the absence of a centre or central power (intellectual or political, religious or academic), one cannot trust any knowledge, ontology or methodology or ethics because everything exists in multiple forms. As such, to avoid the problem of the diversity of ethics, the best solution is to completely abandon ethics and all things that tend to kindle ethical issues and problems.

3. For this article, I adopt the general definition of diaspora as members of ethnic and national communities who have left their homeland but maintain links with the territory they consider their origin.

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