



Diasporic scholarship: racialization, coloniality and de-territorializing knowledge

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In considering how knowledge reproduces the dynamics of coloniality in Geography, scholars have looked beyond the Global North and Global South as cartographical sites, instead seeing them as conceptual frameworks and epistemic positions. Building on this rich work, we draw attention to specific issues obscured within it. Whilst geographical scholarship has moved to recognizing how the Global North and South bleed into each other, it frequently continues to locate scholars themselves within specific territories, labelling them *of* the Global North or *of* the Global South, thereby re-territorializing scholars and their work and reflecting and revealing processes of racialization within the academy.

We ask how those who do not fit into neat geographical imaginations of North and South represent ways to understand and know the world? Specifically, how can we centre the idea of diaspora as part of wider geo- and body political projects that aim to decentre knowledge production? We bring diaspora back into debates on knowledge production to explore how their understanding of the world, rooted in hybrid and transnational ways, can enrich engagements around post-coloniality and decoloniality. We detail how such voices illuminate how racialization, coloniality and difference continue to mark how we know and teach the world. Our argument makes imperative the case for de-territorializing scholars and scholarship.

Keywords: academia, decolonizing knowledge, diaspora, territoriality

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Introduction: situating the problem

Over the past three decades, scholars working on spatial issues including Geography, Planning and Development Studies have been pushing back against the hegemonic epistemologies of development, urbanization and modernity. Scholarship has shown geopolitics and specifically maintenance of the power of the 'Global North' is ingrained in development theory and practice. It has also urged us to move beyond territorial visions of 'development' associated with 'over there' and to recognize how the Global North and South are relational (Slater, 1992; O'Tuathail, 1994; Yiftachel & Mammon, 2022). Current debates around decolonization continue to build on that longer interdisciplinary tradition of postcolonial thinking, drawing our attention to the evolving ways in which colonialism forms knowledge production and legitimation within the academy. Foremost in these debates is how Eurocentric modernity universalizes and totalizes its own episteme rendering invisible and marginal other ways of knowing and being in the world, and the imperative to articulate and take seriously worldviews at the borders of coloniality-modernity (Asher, 2013). These debates have challenged Euro-North American hegemony in academic discourse and practice, and

representations of the Global South within scholarly work. In addition, scholars working on Indigenous and settler-colonial geographies have powerfully complicated the notions of what constitutes the territoriality of the 'Global South' and argued that 'Indigenous geographies and "southern" geographies do not map neatly onto one another' (De Leeuw & Hunt, 2018: 3).

But, whilst scholarship has unsettled discourses of Eurocentric modernity and exposed the racialized workings of knowledge production, this project continues to overlook some important issues. For example, whilst scholars have acknowledged the ways in which migration and racial politics have blurred the boundaries between 'here' and 'there' such that territorially we 'third world at home' (Koptiuch, 1991), it has not fully grappled with how that positions the bodies of migrants. Where do we locate the position and voices of people living in these peripheral and hybrid spaces? *In* the Global North or *in* the Global South?

We write to bring these questions to life and illuminate the ways in which diaspora can also engender other ways of knowing in the academy. However, we contend that diasporic knowledge is at risk of being overlooked because of geographical fault lines that foreground core-periphery and North-South in understanding the politics of knowledge production and the body politics of identity. For example, the geographies of the centre (Western Europe/North America) locate academics and *how* they know; an idea echoed by Radcliffe (2017: 329) who writes, 'The decolonial option switches away from a postcolonial provincializing of Western claims. Instead, the decolonial turn encourages re-thinking the world *from* Latin America, *from* Africa, *from* Indigenous places and *from* the marginalized academia in the global South' (original italics). Thus, the decolonial turn in some discussions is to turn to specific *spaces* 'elsewhere', to identify and amplify voices and ways of knowing from outside of the territories of the so-called West/Global North, producing a particular geography of decolonial knowledge and its producers. While such a project is radical in its scope, pushing us to think of the world differently, it runs several risks, including continuing to perpetuate geographical divides and hierarchies as well as limiting the rich and varied experiences of those who do not fit into such neat geographical spaces and positions. It fails to account for the mobility of knowledge producers who can understand the world from different elsewheres, not just one.

Our argument focuses on development and urban geography and postcolonial literatures that attempt to unsettle its historically universalizing claims vis-à-vis problematic binaries of 'First' and 'Third worlds', 'developed' and 'developing' and more recently 'Global North' and 'Global South'. In thinking about the locational politics of voices, we turn to scholarship on diasporic identities to make imperative the case for de-territorializing scholars and scholarship that cannot be rooted to a single place. We draw on the considerable writing on diasporas and transnationalism that speaks to the movement between and within the so-called Global North and South. Research on diaspora since the 1990s is summarized well by Ipek Demir (2022): as two main bodies of work, the first is 'diaspora as being' with studies focused on what makes diaspora—who is in it, what do they want (to return, to belong, to settle)?—which comes with a sense of fixedness to the idea of diaspora; and the second is 'diaspora as becoming' which is more fluid, subjective, process-orientated and allows for hybridity. Its anti-essentialism explores relative positionings, which allows for a de-territorialization of diaspora and a focus on the multiple relationships between places, people and cultures.

Academic discussions on diasporas in this second body of work range from examining their politics, economic activities, how they view questions of citizenship and so

forth (Mercer & Page, 2014; Raghuram, 2008; Blunt, 2003; Bhatia & Ram, 2004; Tolia-Kelly, 2016). Scholarship on diasporic positioning has also critiqued problematic discussions of identity and hybridity in relation to diaspora communities (Mitchell, 1997; Ahmed, 2013). Some scholars have critiqued the conceptualization of diaspora, arguing that much mainstream work on it continues to preserve colonial ways of thinking about the world—that diaspora remains the ‘other’ linked to ‘elsewhere’ (James, 2016). Gowricharn (2022: 2) for example notes that ethnogenesis may offer a useful way to understand how new ethnicities, hybridities, home-making practices, place attachment and bondings come to be formed in the diaspora. Ashutosh (2020) further notes the varied ways in which transregional spaces are created through dispersals and connections across different terrains, and the infrastructures created to maintain these connections. Demir’s (2022) work on ‘diaspora as decolonisation’, offers a contemporary reformulation of the analytical and practical purchase of diaspora with a focus on what diaspora does, concluding a radical epistemological role in translation. As agents of decolonization, she argues, diaspora ‘speak (s) back’ to the metropole from the metropole and thus destabilizes established hierarchies and imaginations of the Global North and South. It does this by literally offering translations across cultures and cultural norms, and by often living these translations as practice. This stands in contrast to cultural translations in the so-called North that seek to explain and make sense of ‘them’. Diaspora actively challenges homogenizing views of the world and speaks into silences, denials and calculated ignorance in the metropole around the impact of colonialism, slavery and its violence, including within universities.

Our intention is to build on some of this scholarship, and in sympathy with Demir’s argument, simultaneously draw attention to diasporic knowledge as a lens of analysis. In other words, we draw on the critiques of the diaspora as occupying the constitutive outside of the global binary and use that to think about how it can understand the world and offer different intellectual readings of here and there through its own position. Situating our arguments within current debates animated by decolonization and its practice, specifically disrupting dominant knowledge production processes, we strive to understand how diasporic knowledge can expand the boundaries of these discussions. Specifically, we ask how can we centre the idea of diaspora as part of wider geo- and body political projects that aim to decentre knowledge production? In asking this, we include diaspora academics in progressive moves in academia.

The key contribution of this paper is to offer an intervention in exploring the openness of ‘Global North and South’ as conceptual, epistemological frames and the apparent fixedness of scholarly identities as ‘of the Global North’ or ‘of the Global South’. We focus on the unique role of diaspora academics as neither ‘native informants’ (Spivak, 1999) nor ‘neocolonial foreign interventionists’, (Jazeel, 2007) but rather, as people who racialize and are themselves notably racialized, who circulate through the world navigating ‘rootedness’ to specific sites and inhabiting spaces in particular ways, and as such, offering new and useful means to understand the world.

The remainder of this paper lays the conceptual ground for our argument and draws out the relationships between territory and knowledge production. Into this we insert the idea of diaspora and diasporic knowledge as a productive disruption to explore multi-rootedness and transnational embodiment in knowledge production and circulation. Our empirical data is auto-biographical and serves to ground and illuminate the racialized processes in Euro-North America through which we are re-territorialized in relation to where we supposedly ‘come from’. Our conclusion revisits how diaspora

advances wider political projects to decentre knowledge production and makes the case for de-territorializing scholars and scholarship.

Territory and knowledge production

Scholarship in Geography and beyond have long critiqued the hegemonic Eurocentrism of knowledge production. David Slater in his work more than three decades ago, highlighted the intersection between geopolitics and development studies, and the ways in which the concept of development had encased within it, a geopolitical imagination of the non-western world that sought to subjugate and assimilate it in particular ways. In these works, he urged us to think about the relations between the First and Third Worlds and how these categories have come into being as well as encouraging a shift away from a hegemonic Eurocentric view of the world to one where we learn from the South (Slater, 1992; 1993). O'Tuathail (1994) pushed this agenda in new and important directions including disrupting the territorialization of the Third World. As he notes, drawing on others, 'The implosion of the Second World of Communism, the globalization of previously discrete national economies and the informationalisation of the mode of production has produced a spatiality of flows and movements not fixity and presence' (O'Tuathail, 1994: 231). This unmooring of the Global South from a specific hemispheric location has continued with more recent writings that see this term (and the related 'Global East') as a conceptual framework and productive epistemic space not a territorial signifier (Sheppard *et al.*, 2015; Yiftachel & Mammon, 2022; Müller, 2020). Others still have also questioned the stability of the Global North as a homogenous space. For example, scholars have noted how Southern and Eastern parts of Europe have formed its margins and have been orientalised in persistently problematic ways (Leontidou, 2014).

This disruption to territorializing *the* Global North and South is echoed in continuing calls to decolonize the discipline, with different strands of work in geography challenging the hegemonic whiteness of the discipline, attempting to de-centre its knowledge base in different ways. In 2017, the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) (RGS-IBG) annual international conference theme was dedicated to decolonizing geographical knowledges, with the theme intended to encourage a type of 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo, 2002) that explores the geo- and body-politics of how knowledge is universalized and how to 'bring in' to UK Geography diverse epistemic and ethical projects (Radcliffe, 2017). A special section in response to that written by scholars long engaged in disrupting and de-centring knowledge in and of geography was published in the RGS-IBG journal *Area* (Esson *et al.*, 2017). It, alongside other critical work, highlighted some key challenges and provocations for the discipline including deep engagement with racialized hierarchies and the neglect of non-Western concepts and scholarship and (dis)placement of Indigenous and non-white scholars (Esson *et al.*, 2017; Noxolo, 2017; Elliott-Cooper, 2017; Esson, 2020; Sidaway, 2023).

This critical work leads us to pointedly note two slippages in discourses of de-territorializing the Global North and South in knowledge production. Even though there is a recognition of the Global North and South being conceptual frameworks, scholars tend to slip back into using 'Global North' and 'South' as locations (Ghertner, 2014; Schindler, 2017). This then translates into a tendency of decolonial praxis to be evidenced by a search for scholars and conversations from 'over there', beyond or outside of northern metropolises in specific regions (North Africa and the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, for example). Such moves

appear to build on the identity politics and nationalism of the proponents of modernity-coloniality-decoloniality (MCD) school of decolonial scholarship, as noted by Asher (2013: 839) who writes:

Contributors to the MCD project acknowledge that both decolonial thinkers and postcolonial studies ask how colonial legacies shape development, globalization, and modern subjectivity. Yet they do not engage with postcolonial theories on the grounds that they come from metropolitan institutions of higher learning. This seems odd given that most decolonial thinkers are also based at universities of the West (either epistemological or geographically). And if we are urged to go beyond the geopolitics of modern knowledge and attachment to disciplinary thinking, why then identify members by their disciplines and their national (and institutional) locations?

In the paper, Asher consciously mimics some of the techniques of recognition deployed by and about scholars associated with MCD, e.g. 'the ideas of the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (coloniality of power) and the Argentinean/Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel ('transmodernity,' 'philosophy of liberation')' (Asher, 2013: 834). In related decolonial scholarship, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2022: 31–32) also deploys this now familiar technique of introducing scholars by location, too writing of 'Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano [... and ...] the Argentinean decolonial semiotician Walter D. Mignolo'. While introducing 'new' or marginalized scholars thus can simply be convention, we suggest there is more at play. We query what is or ought to be inferred or connoted by the placement of specific scholars? Within debates on decentring knowledges (a largely epistemic issue), is there or should there be a particular legitimacy associated with specific locations? Or a value in and of itself? We question why territorialize scholars whose work can be read as de-territorializing the Global North and South and reforming such sites as conceptual frames and epistemic positions?

Furthermore, in light of the racism of Euro-North American academies and the enduring processes of racialization and the shoring up of hierarchies enacted over Black and brown scholars, one of the consequences of location-identity politics is a deep imaginary of racialized belonging intimately tied not only to locations but to types of scholarship and bodies of knowledge. Asher and Ramamurthy (2020) reflect on this dynamic and the embodiment of regions as they describe how they were read as 'postcolonial feminists' by decolonial scholars (within reductive binaries of what exactly this means), almost irrespective of what they actually said and their intent, because they appear to be South Asian. This produces a type of sanctioned silencing that can further entrench structural violence enacted against racialized and minoritized people.

We build on the work of Asher and Asher and Ramamurthy by demonstrating how decolonizing praxis can continue to operate on the assumption of 'rootedness' of academics and academic work in specific ways and assigns particular politics to their knowledge production based on their location. This is in complement to the second slippage in discourses of de-territorializing the Global North and South, where learning from 'over there' typically relies on a predominance of scholarship of particular places in the so-called Global South, as being representative of (for example) Southern urbanism. At the top of the list is scholarship on India, South Africa, Lebanon, Egypt, Brazil, and a handful of major cities within. As with the problematic neglect of power relations within the so-called Global North, a 'Southern turn in urban theory' (Sheppard *et al.*, 2015), for example pays limited attention to the elitist politics of knowledge production within 'Global South' countries—how certain institutions, cities, regions and even scholars and activists come to form, embody and speak on behalf of entire groups

and regions and become hegemonic producers of 'southern knowledge'. This then perpetuates a cycle of marginalizing other voices thus entrenching inequity, rather than decolonizing knowledge production (also see Jazeel, 2007). In other words, such efforts to de-territorialize the Global North and South ironically manifest as attachments to territorial embodiments and thereby reify partial views of the world.

Linked to this problematic positioning of knowledge producers is the politics of knowledge validation. This raises the question what knowledge is deemed legitimate and where does the embodiment of specific identities and the situatedness of people fit into these politics of validation? Specifically here, we signal the ongoing problematic of authorization within academic research. Thinking as diaspora '*from the South*' within the Euro- North American academy there are assumptions made about where are we allowed to work and whom are we supposed to represent. Althea-Maria Rivas (2018: 137), illustrates this predicament through her experience of being a Black woman researcher in Afghanistan and the backdrop of racialized expectations that took different forms, such as 'a surprised look as I was not what they expected when they heard a Western researcher was coming, or uncertainty about what to make of me at various events'. Similarly, reflecting from our diasporic position as women and racialized minorities in the UK context, who have worked in 'non-native' contexts, we consider how we have been racialized in at least three different contexts that we discuss in the next section: the 'non-native' field spaces in South Africa and Lebanon respectively, in our supposed 'native' field spaces of India, and by colleagues and institutions where we are 'homed' in the metropole.

These experiences have led us to reflect on a few contentious questions that sit with us as unresolved questions and that we share in the spirit of collective inquiry and provocation. We ask how might intersectional analyses and the blurring of the north-south global divisions enable us all to grapple more critically with questions of elite knowledge producers both in and of the so-called Global North and the Global South, the marginalization of certain other knowledge producers, both in the 'Global North and the Global South' and the politics of knowledge circulation as being 'authentic' or 'canonical'? How might it alert us to the ways in which people come to inhabit the margins of knowledge production? How might a consideration of those who lie in the interstices of different worlds enable the project of disrupting hegemonic knowledge to advance? In response to the final question, we offer a deeper level of query and focus on diaspora within and outside geographical research to ask: what happens to those who inhabit the in-between, who are part of the diaspora and are multiply rooted in very particular ways? How do they challenge how we divide the world and how do their ways of being in the world expand our thinking on disrupting the hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge? Ultimately, we seek to explore how, in a time of global knowledge production, are we made either 'global knowledge producers' or 'local'? These overarching, intersecting and bubbling questions led us to circle back to how can we centre the idea of diaspora as part of wider geo- and body political projects that aim to decentre knowledge production?

In recent debates of decoloniality within the Euro-North American academy, for those of us located at the core of knowledge production, there is a notable tension in the role of academics racialized as white and the space that is given to whiteness within these debates (Esson, 2020; Baldwin, 2017; Murrey, 2019; Daley & Murrey, 2022). Esson *et al.*, (2017), Hawthorn (2019), and Noxolo (2022) navigate the tension by drawing on Critical Race Studies and the crafting of Black Geographies as a field of inquiry and intervention, which blurs the lines of the geographical envelope by

articulating a rootedness to decolonial scholarship embodied in Euro-North American Black and brown scholars, but they stand as an exception. Popular calls to decolonize the curriculum, research and the Euro-North American academy at large are not so mindful of Black and brown scholars in their midst or indeed the power relations amongst Black and brown scholars located in the so-called Global North and South. Rather, there is a tendency to homogenize scholarship as being 'from the Global South' or 'from the Global North' which in itself can be a deeply oppressive move. A different focus on diaspora as we suggest, can perhaps poignantly query the location and rootedness of knowledge in transnational and hybrid bodies and suggest possibilities for progressive action. In this, we write sympathetically and in solidarity with Noxolo's (2022: 1131) exploration of the consequences of 'embodied diversity for geographical knowledge', and echo calls for greater attentiveness and scholarship between differently racialized groups and their spatiality, outside of whiteness.

Positioning diaspora and diasporic knowledge

The term 'diaspora', Mercer and Page (2014) explain, comes from the Greek *speiro* and means to sow or disperse. While the term is politically fluid in its application and meaning, and its precise definition varies according to disciplinary traditions, its mobilization as a concept is anchored in ideas of rootedness and rootlessness. Within diaspora studies, which has grown markedly since the 1990s across the social sciences, geographers engage with the term as a spatial concept associated with territory, migration, and home (Rios & Adiv, 2010). In cultural geography, the study of diaspora focuses particularly on locating collective sentiments of belonging and identity within material and imaginative processes of homemaking (Blunt, 2003; Tolia-Kelly, 2016). Diaspora, in these fields of study, is not a noun applied to a group of people dispersed from one homeland to another (as in its original meaning). It serves better as an adjective, where diasporic denotes a specific 'diasporic identity' or 'diasporic space'. Such identities and spaces are distinguished from their majority-culture surroundings and suggest diaspora hold a different way of being and navigate different ways to becoming.

The geography of 'diasporic identity' as concept has evolved within diaspora studies (Brubaker, 2005). Initially suggestive of membership to a community of migrants, a diasporic identity was said to produce insight of the 'host' country. Diasporas were thus simultaneously de-territorialized through migration (shifted from there to here) and re-territorialized through the assumption of a point of origin (Mitchell, 1997). Such specific geographic housing and analysis of diaspora has now shifted to a more nuanced and deeper understanding of diaspora as multi-rooted and a transnational embodiment that disrupts the bipolarity of 'home' and 'host' to allow for 'the in-between-ness that many migrants [actually] experience' (Rios & Adiv, 2010: 10). As noted earlier, scholars have discussed how diasporas can be understood to emerge through a process of ethnogenesis (Gowricharn, 2022) and the varied nature of this process helps us to recognize the different connections they make across the world and the different infrastructures used to create and sustain these networks (Ashutosh, 2020). This sense of in-betweenness is what Homi Bhabha has referred to as the 'third space', a space that 'enables other positions to emerge' (Bhabha, 1994: 211). While we are aware of the critiques made of Bhabha's notion of hybridity in diaspora studies and postcolonial studies (e.g. Young, 1995), in this paper we are foremost concerned with academic knowledge production. Bhabha's

articulation of hybridity enables us to consider that diasporas see and think differently, in and of their contexts. We mobilize this to discuss academic diaspora, on and for whom there is very little theorization.

Understanding diaspora as transnational opens the possibility of diaspora occupying a different geography and experiential space from 'host' and 'home' communities, a space from which alternate theorizations are possible. To Brah and Phoenix (2004: 83) a 'diasporic space' is a concept that:

embraces the intersection of 'difference' in its variable forms, placing emphasis upon emotional and psychic dynamics as much as socio-economic, political and cultural differences. Difference is thus conceptualised as social relation; experience; subjectivity; and, identity.

This emphasis on difference underlies the field of diaspora studies, particularly how difference is experienced and then negotiated by diaspora through, for example, performances of hybrid and transnational identities, and more recently how difference is translated and acted upon to disrupt imaginations of here and elsewhere (Bhatia & Ram, 2004; Ghosh & Wang, 2003; Demir, 2021).

In Brah and Phoenix's (2004) articulation of diasporic space, there is an assertion that diasporas relate to how other people experience the world, see and are different from their cultural surroundings. We mobilize this assertion and add that being diaspora, being different, affects epistemology and the situatedness of knowledge production. The idea of a diasporic epistemology draws on the work of Stuart Hall (1995) on Caribbean identities, particularly. In this work, Hall notes that in free and forced migration there is always historical violence and rupture, and that its effects (and for some the very memory of it) produces a different kind of life and a different understanding of society and its rules. Diasporic epistemology adds a deeper dimension to studies that frames diaspora predominantly as an object of enquiry, and serves to query the idea of thinking from elsewhere as the principal frame for thinking differently.

This is not to suggest a particular diasporic group are internally homogenous and that there is one diasporic epistemology or experience. Indeed, there are trenchant critiques that our conceptualization of diaspora as being different, hybrid or occupying in-betweenness reinforces ideas of coloniality and practices of racism by 'othering' those who are seen to be 'different' (James, 2016). Rather, drawing on Stuart Hall and the distinct layering of African, European and American presence that constitute Caribbean identities, challenges us to think about who is the native and who is the migrant and how we come to embody and complicate these ideas of race and difference. Drawing on his work, we also acknowledge that there are differences within multiple epistemological lenses forged by the experience of being diaspora and we do not intend to extrapolate from a population, a singular, and fetishized experience. For example, for South Asian diaspora in western countries, 'assimilation' is impacted considerably by the politics of migration and hospitality of the countries to which they migrate. First generation migrants navigate among themselves the class, caste and social status they held in their countries of origin (Jazeel, 2006), as well as the racial, social and economic politics of their host countries. By the second or third generation diaspora, such navigations are layered and further complicated by the gender, racial and sexual politics of the majority culture within which they live and may have always lived (Bhatia & Ram, 2004). Thus, over successive generations of diaspora, transnational hybrid identities are not simply performed in discrete material and imaginative acts, but actually constitute an entire social world that demands diasporas are hyper-attentive to their surroundings and positioning within, not least, the academy.

Re-territorializing diaspora: situating ourselves

We write with specific reference to Indian diaspora in Euro-North America, a positioning that relates to our own situatedness within the academy. We have both been 'placed' in racialized ways in at least three different contexts: the 'non-native' field spaces in South Africa and Lebanon respectively, in our supposed 'native' field spaces of India, and by colleagues and institutions where we are 'homed' in the so-called Global North.

Our journeys into diasporic space have been different affecting the nuances of our placement. Kamna was born and raised in London in the early 1980s, the daughter of parents who migrated to the UK from Gujarat, India in the 1970s. This London was mainly white, taking in the aftermath of race riots in the predominantly Afro-Caribbean areas of Notting Hill and Tottenham, and South Asian areas like Southall. London was a place where racist epitaphs on graffitied walls, in mainstream political slogans, or aural echoes on the street were not unusual to the ear and eye. In this environment, she learnt race and ethnicity determined relational networks of power, life chances and the geography of London, in terms of where she felt she could go without arousing suspicion and where she could not.

Throughout her doctoral journey in a development studies school, her reasons for conducting research in South Africa were subject to a wide range of queries rooted in racialized expectations, be it from a well-intentioned supervisor who asked sometime into her doctoral studies, 'why are you not researching India?'; email chains that she was eventually copied into between academics in the UK (with whom she was in contact) and in South Africa helping to set up connections and introductions, where her interest in the country was rationalized as 'maybe she has family there, I don't know...'; through to academic conferences where after presenting her work was often asked firstly, 'where are you from' and following an unsatisfactory response ('London') then where her parents are from, in an effort to make sense of and place her interest in South Africa. Intellectual curiosity was always insufficient an explanation.

When Kamna broadened the focus of her research to India, in part due to a fascination over what difference it actually made to her research experiences and outcomes, in light of people's racialized expectations of her, she encountered distinct processes of being placed by people in India as both an 'us' and an 'other'. As discussed elsewhere (Patel, 2017), paramount to being placed was her caste-position and positioning. For her, caste was an old-fashioned word from her parents' old-fashioned world; it was a term that meant nothing to her (which in the UK is of course a caste-privileged position in itself). Yet, she was read in sympathetic ways as an ally, confidant and as 'someone who knows' by some research respondents, and antagonistic ways by others as someone who did not fit an appropriate (to them) caste-position as a British woman researcher.

Romola moved with her family from Kolkata, India, first to the US as a child in the early 90s. The US has its unique racial history and politics which are intertwined with immigration. Within US immigration and racial politics, Asian Americans (a problematic term encompassing a very large and diverse range of people) occupy a particular space as both racialized, feminized subjects who are seen to be threats as well as model minorities. Geopolitical and geo-biopolitical issues such as 9/11, the recent diplomatic tensions with China, the rise of COVID, and the resultant racial attacks on Asian Americans highlight the precarious position that they hold within the country (Li & Nicholson Jr, 2021). Within the diaspora communities themselves, there are

considerable racializing practices including the use of derogatory language and caricaturing of recent migrants by first- and second-generation migrants, which she also encountered.

Later, as an adult, she moved to the UK for professional reasons and to join her partner. She thus shifted from being part of the diaspora in one country to another and embodied the identities of both her previous countries. In the US and the UK, she was thus racialized differently—seen to possess certain skills as well as ties to imagined ‘homelands’—a point that will be elaborated upon below. Meanwhile, in India, where she continued to have a home, and strong social and emotional ties, she also came to be racialized differently, as someone who was now part of the diaspora, and not entirely ‘native’. Strangers and acquaintances sometimes questioned her linguistic abilities, and occasionally accused her of belonging to ‘neither here nor there’. The question of what constituted ‘home’ became complex as a result of such global circulations as she felt she belonged in three different countries and found it difficult to answer when asked ‘where do you come from?’

A final site of racialization presented itself during fieldwork which began during the PhD process and continued on. Driven by both personal history and solidarity with particular people and issues, she went to work in the Middle East and India. While the racialization process in India began in ways outlined above, she was also racialized differently within the context of the Middle East. Here, as a woman of Indian origin, of US nationality, she confused many of her interlocutors who told her plainly that they imagined all Americans to be white. To be a racial minority from ‘elsewhere’ doing research on Arab communities was thus seen as a novelty with both positive and negative outcomes. This presented complications not just in the fieldwork but also within the Global North academia where she was ‘homed’. Here, it was not unsurprising to encounter colleagues overlooking her long standing work in the Middle East and placing her squarely as a South Asianist—assumptions, often driven by her ethnic identity.

Through these trajectories, we draw attention to the ways diaspora academics are enfolded in the race politics of their universities and wider historic and cultural contexts of both the countries where they ‘live’ and where they supposedly ‘come from’. In our case, especially how the bodies of brown women are enfolded in institutional whiteness (Mirza, 2018; Ahmed, 2012) and the risk this engenders of, for example, diasporic academics as ‘native informant’, positioned in relation to ‘there’ in the Global South, and problematically conferred with legitimacy to speak on behalf of specific ‘others’ (Bhattacharjee, 2005). In geography and development studies, in our work, we put forward that we—Indian diaspora academics in Euro-North America—are made the ‘native informant’ and are positioned in the North with some ‘insider’ access or insight into the South, and often, particularly in relation to countries we purportedly ‘come from’. Such assumptions continue to reify the ‘othering’ of non-white academics as belonging ‘over there’ and providing unique interpretations into Southern practices, particularly practices of their ‘native’ countries and simultaneously situating such academics out as ‘out of place’ when not researching their fellow ‘natives’. Limited reflection is provided not only on the problematics of speaking for others, but the racial politics around it. While in the institutional spaces of whiteness, diasporic academics can be seen as translators of ‘elsewhere’ these same academics may be viewed as being part of a privileged white academia and acting as ‘neocolonial foreign interventionists’ amongst academics in the so-called Global South (Jazeel, 2007). This is not least in part due to their privileged positions within academia in the Global North, which lies at the centre of knowledge production, but also how they are legitimized and privileged as

interpreters of the Global South at the expense of academics working in institutions outside the Euro-North American academy. But this position, as noted above, is inattentive to the locational politics of knowledge production within the contexts themselves and fails to recognize the complex ways in which diaspora academics interpret and understand the world.

These practices not only play into performing racialized expectations as knowledge producers but does nothing to deconstruct the cartographical distinctions of Global North and Global South. Rather, it overlooks the considerable differences between people who sit in multiple racialized hierarchies. We posit the territorialization of academic knowledge is an act of coloniality, erasing the voices of minoritized communities of scholars including diaspora within the so-called Global North. In this case, there is a danger of diasporic academics being othered and of being enveloped within whiteness in wholesale drives to 'turn to the south' in efforts to de-centre knowledge production. In a world where migration is increasingly commonplace, where migration paths become ever wider and more complex, and identities shift and evolve, it is surprising that so little consideration is paid to the voices of migrant, transnational and/or diasporic scholars and their locational politics as knowledge producers and potential to decentre knowledge production.

In closing our argument, we turn to Jazeel (2007: 289) who astutely asks 'how might scholars who attempt to speak across the global south and north (in whichever direction) bring geographically or intellectually divergent cultures of knowledge production into effective relation with one another?'. That is, how can we centre the idea of the diaspora as part of wider geo- and body-political projects that aim to decentre knowledge production? How do we start to unpack what the diaspora does to pluralize knowledges? For that, we need to de-territorialize the diasporic body. It is to this point that we turn in our final section.

Reflections on de-territorializing through the lens and body of diaspora

Geography has made great strides in disrupting the 'Global North' and 'Global South' as bounded territorial markers, synonymous with valuable sites of knowledge production, knowledgeable bodies and unidirectional flows of power. In doing so it has helped to amplify voices, perspectives and scholarship from different parts of the world, especially in former European colonies and from Indigenous communities. However, there is a disconnect between the idea of Global North and South as conceptual and epistemological frameworks, and scholarly practices that tend to locate them in specific territories. As a result, there are two slippages within this valuable endeavour, the first is the demonstration of decolonial praxis that elicits a search for scholarly bodies from elsewhere (outside Euro-North America), and the second whereby some parts of the world stand in for others. The intersections of these slippages creates the danger of producing locational scholarship that not only reifies unhelpful binaries and divisive geographies, it can homogenize spaces and not see the people marginalized within them. From the perspective of diaspora academics in the Euro-North American academy, these geographies furthermore can become exclusionary, discriminatory (Jazeel & McFarlane, 2010) and marginalizing. They can flatten our prospects to knowing or being either from 'here' or 'there'. Curtailing the in-betweenness of our presence can undermine our particular experiences of multi-rootedness, transnationalism, and diminish the possibilities of diaspora as theorists.

As we decentre these geographies, we need to also de-territorialize the bodies that hybridize these spaces. Through that, we arrive at the possibility of decentring knowledge production. Diasporic knowledge that lies in the interstices of these worlds can then be activated as an important mode of decolonization, particularly in Geography. Here, we draw upon the work of Chandra Mohanty (2002: 502–04) who draws our attention to the ways we inhabit different worlds simultaneously, how we can draw on our ‘common differences’ to construct a ‘framework of solidarity through shared values that remains attentive to power differences between and among communities’. Mohanty’s intervention opens up possibilities of thinking not only across borders, but offers opportunities for those such as diasporic academics, who straddle different geographies and epistemic envelopes to engage in critical and progressive politics and activism around different issues. It enables the possibility of people who are situated differently (more generally) to construct transnational dialogue and speak with others whilst being mindful of power geometries that permeate geographies.

As noted at the start of the paper, we are sympathetic and write in solidarity with contemporary work on decolonization. What we call for then is an expansion and reflection of this work, for scholars to be simultaneously alert to indigenous and situated knowledge, but also attentive to the dangers of ‘nativizing’ people and epistemologies as diaspora scholarship has noted. We ask that scholars interested in decentring knowledge production in academia are alert to slippages in their use and imaginations of the Global North and South as location (within wider arguments on Global North and South as conceptual and epistemological frameworks). This also means being attentive to who and where comes to represent the ‘Global North’ and ‘South’, and to being alert to power differences in producing knowledge within these territories. In other words, in order to be truly committed to the project of decentring knowledge production, we need to recognize how even within the privileged academia of the ‘Global North’ not all voices are equal, or equally represented. Rather, they are racialized in different ways, in different parts of the world, and through the ways in which they circulate the globe. To decentre knowledge production is to think about its continuing colonial legacy embedded in its territorializing claims and bordering effects, even within privileged institutional spaces where racial and ethnic minority voices continue to inhabit the margins.

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