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Negotiating positionality amid postcolonial knowledge relations: insights from Nordic-based Sub-Saharan African academics.

Gabriel U. Ezechukwu

Department of Education, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

ABSTRACT
This article is concerned with the issue of positionality in the context of transnational academic career. Focusing on the views and experiences of Nordic-based Sub-Saharan African academics, the paper adopts a transcolonial perspective to examine the role of coloniality in framing the academics' positions within Nordic and African higher education spaces. In doing so, this article contributes to the understanding of how somewell-established inequalities are produced and reproduced within a seemingly innocuous policy sphere such as internationalization. By focusing on two different postcolonial contexts, it also serves as a valuable frame of reference for deepening the understanding of coloniality as a transcolonial phenomenon that globally unfolds across different postcolonial terrains. Theoretically, the article develops the idea of a body-knowledge-space configuration as a framework of analysis that simultaneously considers how structures and sentiments that emerged from colonialism frame contemporary realities within West and Non-West settings.

KEYWORDS Coloniality; transcoloniality; African academics; Nordic countries; Africa; racialization

Introduction

This article explores the dark side of higher education (HE) internationalization as expressed chiefly through transnational academic career. Using the views and experiences of Nordic-based African academics as a case study, the article addresses the issue of positionality in the context of transnational academic career and the role coloniality plays in this. As the primary phenomenon that drives most contemporary trends in HE, internationalization is largely viewed as HE's main response to the realities of globalization (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley 2009; Egron-Polak and Hudson 2014; de Wit et al. 2015). Globalization, understood here as underpinned by the growing integration of the world's economy and the ubiquitous application of information and communication technologies at all levels of human activities (cf. Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley 2009), has created the condition for increased human interaction, necessitated the exchange of ideas and intensified the application of knowledge in human activities. Within the global HEsector, this has meant, amongst other things, the rise of English as the prime language of science, increased mobility of staff and students and a denser and more dynamic cooperation at systemic, institutional and individual levels.

While the challenges and promises that arise from the above realities have been of considerable research interest, studies exploring how the patterns of power and privileges that arise from internationalization structure individual academics' positions within HE are only beginning to emerge. For example, Bönisch-Brednich (2016) and Phillipson (2017) link the hegemonic position of the English language in the internationalization context to the neo-imperialistic drives of Britain and the United States. Other issues that have received considerable attention are gender (Leemann 2010) and nationality (Gerhards, Hans, and Drewski 2018). There are also studies by Morley et al. (2018; 2019) and Stein, Andreotti, and Suša(2019) that examine the interplay between power and privilege within the context of the internationalization of HE. While these studies did much to highlight how systems of differences and mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion that operate within HE are amplified within

the context of internationalization, they fall short of explicitly engaging with the place of coloniality within the discourse. A notable exception to this is the work by Stein et al. (2016), which, though theoretical, situates the analysis of internationalization within decolonial tradition and concludes that 'most institutional internationalization efforts operate from within a dominant global imaginary that tends to naturalize existing racial hierarchies and economic inequities in the realm of education and beyond' (2). From within the Nordic context, Mählck (2013, 2016) and Mählck andFellesson (2016) are notable examples of efforts to address the role of coloniality within the context of internationalization. The studies, however, are limited to the experiences of early-career academics (doctoral students) and were pursued within the specific context of Sweden's bilateral cooperation with Southern African countries.

Though the present article is in conversation with the abovementioned studies, it differs in its scope and focus. First, it centres on internationalization as it is expressed through transnational academic careers. Focusing on the experiences and views of Nordic-based Sub-Saharan African academics, it looks at the role of coloniality in structuring the ways in which the academics position themselves within Nordic and African HE spaces. The aim is to show how knowledge production and knowledge relationships within the context of internationalization are imbued with power and privileges that have been conditioned by the historical specificity that embeds contemporary HE. The paper also develops an idea of a body-knowledge-space configuration as a framework of analysis that shows how power and privilege frame academics' positionality in different postcolonial contexts. In doing so, the article adds specific stakes to the debates about global knowledge production; it contributes to the understanding of how some well-established inequalities are produced and reproduced within a seemingly innocuous policy sphere such as internationalization. Focusing on two different postcolonial contexts, it also serves as a valuable frame of reference for deepening the understanding of coloniality as a transcolonial phenomenon that has globally unfolds across different postcolonial terrains.

The article is structured as follows: first, the Western-based Sub-Saharan African academic is described against the realities of the global HE context with particular attention given to the Nordic and African HE spaces. This is done using Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) assertion that 'the modern foundation of knowledge is territorial and imperial' (205) as the underlying assumption. Next is the theoretical framework. This also locates the study within the postcolonial tradition and introduces the concept of coloniality as an analytical tool for highlighting the dark side of policies and practices that lace contemporary HE. The idea of a body-knowledge-space configuration is also used here to highlight the transcolonial aspect of coloniality. This is followed by the research questions and method. Finally come the findings, which are presented in two parts: showing the academics' positioning within the Nordic context and African context, respectively.

Situating the overseas-based African academic

The global HE landscape has been likened to an empire, which is made up of different territories of knowledge (Fahey and Kenway 2010). The idea of territory can be understood in both physical and social terms. The physical aspect of a knowledge territory highlights the embeddedness of knowledge within a material space. This builds on the claim by Shapin (1995) that 'science is undeniably made in specific sites, and it discernibly carries the marks of those sites of production' (306). In keeping with this claim, it is logical to expect that individuals associated with a particular knowledge territory will always be identified with that territory. Hence, within the global knowledge empire, the overseas-based African academic will always be associated with Africa and the predominant perception about the knowledge that is produced therein.

Beyond its materiality, a territory is equally a sociocultural entity, marked by human demography–including their visual features and sociality. Unlike the physical element of a territory, the sociocultural element of a territory is susceptible to discursive practices (Jamieson 2002). Therefore, while it is widely agreed that every society has its own civilization, beliefs about the validity, acceptability and superiority of one civilization over another underpin the global knowledge empire. Thus, the global knowledge empire can be mapped according to the perceived acceptability and superiority of the knowledge territories of which it is constituted. In this regard, countries in the global North occupy central positions (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley 2009).

Beliefs about the superiority or otherwise of any knowledge territory are, however, mediated by both economic and political power (Mignolo 2002). The mediating effects of these factors not only shape the realities in individual knowledge territories but also hierarchize the landscape of the global knowledge empire. For example, the economic and political advantage held by western countries ensures that they maintain their dominance over other countries. This is because the quality and centrality of a university or academic system has much to do with the wealth of the country (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley 2009). Furthermore, if HE, as outlined by Caruso and de Wit (2015), traditionally develops along trends in economic globalization, it follows that rich and advanced systems of HE will, in this globalized era, continue to maintain their dominance, especially as globalization tends to concentrate wealth, knowledge and power in those already possessing them (cf. Altbach and Knight 2007). These rich academic systems, which are largely located in the global North, determine international standards for scholarship (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley 2009). Their power lies not only in their financial clout but also in their being at the very heart of Western civilization and cultural domination –a domination that is achieved by the universalization of the West's intellectual and cultural experiences, making it the standard against which the rest of the world is indexed (Santos 2007; MaldonadoTorres 2004).

This is not, however, to suggest that the processes involved in the configuration of the global knowledge empire are necessarily straightforward. First, the empire is not fixed, as there are constant realignments amongst the constituting knowledge territories. Second, as Fahey and Kenway (2010) argue, though every empire has a strong metropolitan centre against which other territories are considered to be adjoined and subaltern, it may also be that one subaltern territory, relative to other territories, is considered a centre with its own adjoining territories. The above situation best explains the position of the Nordic HE space within the global knowledge empire. Relative to the US and most English-speaking countries in the western hemisphere, the Nordic HE space sits at the edge of the empire. However, on account of its relative wealth and by virtue of its being an integral part of the westernization project, it constitutes a centre to most Eastern European countries, especially those from the old Soviet Bloc. The foregoing argument presupposes a global knowledge continuum where the perceived superiority of an intellectual system is relative to the system to which it is compared. If the location of a particular system within the continuum is a function of economic strength and of cultural proximity to Western civilization, one can safely say that the African HE space sits at the very edge of the peripheries of the empire (cf. Gerhards, Hans, and Drewski 2018).

Framing the study

This article is framed by decolonial thinking. It centres on the intersection points of geography and human interaction which, when critically interrogated, raise issues of power and privilege that have roots in colonialism. Central to the analysis is the notion of coloniality. The notion thrives on the view that the ideological and philosophical structures that sustained colonialism left marks on both the colonised and the colonisers. These 'marks' and their workings within the modern society are often characterised as coloniality. Coloniality is therefore said to be

concomitant with modernity –only that it is the dark side of modernity (Giraldo 2016). This means that any effort to critically examine modern institutions and practices would necessarily come face-to-face with coloniality.

Within the field of HE, coloniality frames and orientates key aspects of the academic enterprise, especially pertaining to knowledge production and distribution. An instance of this is the control of academic publication by entities in the global North (Omobowale et al. 2014; Collyer 2018). Research shows that this has far-reaching implications for academics from peripheral countries. For example, citation analysis not only shows that scholars in the global North are cited more than their Southern counterparts, but that Southern scholarship is rarely cited by Northern and Southern scholars (Collyer 2014, 2018). Another facet of this is the emergence of English as the lingua-franca of scholarship (Altbach 2013). According to Curry and Lillis (2010), academic publishing takes place within a global marketplace 'where texts are accorded different values, and within a global economy of signs where English holds pride of place' (1). Being that English is also gaining popularity as the language of instruction and administration within the global HE sector, it is impossible for academics to thrive in their professions without a reasonably high level of skill in English. Flowerdew (2001, 2008) notes that unlike those using English as a first language, second-language users of the language have to spend time, money and energy on formally learning the language and may also have to contend with negative attitudes and prejudices from journal editors and reviewers. The realities that are described above have roots in colonialism since it is colonialism that institutionalized the supremacy of the Eurocentric ways of knowing and validating knowledge. These policies and practices reinforce, in both explicit and subtle ways, the assumption of the universality of knowledge and ideologies that originate from the West (Barber 2003; Alatas 2003).

Another of knowledge production in which coloniality is implicated is in the domain of research funding. Literature indicates that issues of national wealth limit the capacity of Southern countries to fund research, thereby leading to Northern dominance of research funding outlets (Barrett, Crossley, and Dachi 2011;Blicharskaetal.2017). This structures the opportunity for successful grant application in favour of Northern researchers. As noted by Blicharska et al. (2017), issues bordering on national interest often frame institutional funding arrangements in ways that explicitly promote Northern researchers at the expense of Southern researchers. These funding agencies usually favour research themes and methodological standards that comply with the cultural and scientific traditions and perspectives of the North (Blicharska et al.)

On the strength of the foregoing, the article's focus on policies and practices in HE makes coloniality a key aspect of enquiry. This is because it is a phenomenon that embodies the continued influence of the structures of power and privilege that have emerged with colonialism. The focus on coloniality helps show the participants' positionality as the outcome of power relations and structures of inequality within knowledge relationship settings. To account for how power and privilege are embodied in different geographic spaces, the notion of coloniality is analytically stretched to construct the idea of a 'body-knowledge-space configuration.' While this construction may be novel in terms of its formulation, the idea itself is not new, since Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) have long advanced the idea of a 'body-geographic divide' (305) that thrives on an imperial cartography of knowledge. The idea of a body-knowledge-space configuration is used to show coloniality as an embodied phenomenon that has effects within a material space. In other words, it links knowledge to the body and space. Furthermore, applying the idea to two different postcolonial settings (the Nordic and African contexts), shows coloniality as a phenomenon whose effects and operations transcend colonial divides. In other words, the construct serves the transcolonial outlook of this article and underscores the need to examine the different ways that coloniality finds expression within specific geographic contexts and amongst different collectives.

The argument advanced in this article is based on the premise that, within HE, as in other social formations, modes of attributions and classifications (e.g., race, ethnicity, age, gender, culture, nationality, etc.) exist that produce complex, interweaving forms of advantage and disadvantage for some people at different times and places and, that the global HE landscape is unequal. Structured mainly along colonial differences (Mignolo 2002).

Research questions and methods

This article discusses the structuring role of coloniality in transnational academic careers. Centred on the experiences of Nordic-based Sub-Saharan African academics, the guiding questions are as follows: How do Nordic-based Sub-Saharan African academics position themselves as they transverse back and forth along the line of Nordic-African knowledge spaces and what role does coloniality play in this?

Using in-depth interviews as the primary research tool, the study upon which this article is based explores the views and experiences of twenty-five academics in Finland, Sweden and Norway. The criteria for participant selection were that the individual must identify as Sub-Saharan African, must have completed their doctoral education and must be engaged in paid/funded research and/or teaching. Participants were recruited through purposive/snowball sampling techniques. The process was carried out in two stages. The first stage involved a search through the personnel lists on the webpages of different academic departments at Nordic universities and research institutions with a view to identifying possible participants. Emails were sent to those who were assumed to be SubSaharan Africans. The email was aimed at confirming their nationality and soliciting their participation in the research project in the event of them confirming their SubSaharan African background. In the second stage, participants were identified through referral from the first group of participants. Some of the participants were, however, known to the researcher, and these participants were directly approached for their participation. Of the twenty-five participants, five were females. In terms of rank and field of expertise, the participants came from a wide range of disciplinary traditions and represent a broad spectrum of rank within academia (ranging from post-doctoral candidates to full professors).

As there are relatively few Nordic-based Sub-Saharan African academics, the article pays serious attention to the issues of privacy and confidentiality. Hence, no detailed description of individual participants is given, and efforts were made to avoid referencing the participants in a way that would identify them. Issues of distance and other constraints to easy access meant that only eight of the interviews were done face-to-face; fifteen were conducted via Skype, and two were conducted via telephone.

Data was analysed through a process of in-depth reading in which participants' responses to questions around the themes of 'career experiences,' 'diasporic activities,' 'transnational connections' and the 'political economy of HE' were scrutinised. To obtain a clear indication of how coloniality structures the participants' positions, attention was also paid to how they framed their responses, particularly their choices of words and expressions. Though a thematic analysis method was followed in this process, more than being common categories, the themes that emerged should be considered as instances and the spaces in which individual positions appeared to have been articulated. This is similar to the approach adopted by Clegg (2008) in a study in which she addressed the question of academic identities by focusing on the lived experiences of practicing academics in a British university.

Knowing, however, that enquiries that touch on issues of race often tend to generate tension and controversy –more so in the colourblind, exceptionalist atmosphere of Nordic societies –serious considerations were given to ethical issues that could arise. Beginning with the participant-recruitment phase, the researcher was open about the nature of the questions that would be addressed in the interview. The researcher was also attentive to the participants'

demands in instances where they requested to see the interview transcripts or that certain things they had said be taken off the record.

The researcher's positionality also raises some ethical concerns. Being of Sub-Saharan African origin and in social relationship with some of the participants, the researcher takes an insider-outsider/in-group-out-group position. While this position has the advantage of easing access to the participants and enhancing a deeper and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and views due to commonality of language, beliefs and experiences, it also comes with considerable ethical concerns. In this study, the ethical concern centres mostly on issues of privacy and confidentiality. Concerning this, the researcher is aware that his in-group position may increase participants' fear that their reports could be shared amongst group members. This in turn may adversely affect the degree to which the participants would be open and sincere in their responses. To manage this, active efforts were made to ensure the interviews were a dialogical process in which both the researcher and participants discussed their views and experiences around the issues that were raised.

Nevertheless, according to the belief that there is nothing like a 'fixed, stable and cognitively processed lived experience' (Morley, Leyton, and Hada 2019, 52), the views and posturing that are apparent in the article are to be considered partial and situated because they are produced in specific circumstances and are framed by those circumstances (cf. Rose 1997). As such, the choice of qualitative methods is not due to a belief in the idea of a subject who represents and advances a universal truth. However, considering the sociopolitical context within which this study was carried out, it is arguably an effective way of giving voice to the silences and absences in the discourse of internationalization within Nordic and African HE spaces.

Nordic colonial complexities

Nordic countries –Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden –have often positioned themselves as the 'good' West, showing themselves to be the exceptions to the rule when it comes to Western prejudice, racism and paternalism towards the non-white world (Palmberg 2009, 75). The popular narrative is that they do not have a colonial past and therefore unlike most European centres, they are not burdened by colonial vestiges that often manifest in the form of racial inequalities and oppression, economic exploitation and political repression. This narrative may not be unconnected to the foreign policy direction that Nordic countries took during the twilight of western colonialism towards countries in the global South that were struggling for independence. In the case of African countries, this includes significant f inancial support and political solidarity for South-Africa's African National Congress and Namibia's South West Africa People's Organisation as well as the advancement of foreign aid for development in the areas of education and health. The activities of Nordic missionaries in Africa whose communications and records invoke images of Africa as needy and helpless are also connected to this narrative. According to Palmberg (2009), these images did not only elicit sympathy but led to an entrenched view of Africans as destitute and the Nordics as their benefactors.

Yet, while these countries cannot be counted amongst colonial superpowers, research shows that they actually have colonial histories and that their contemporary sociality is tainted by a colonial worldview. For example, Finland and Norway, which never had colonies of their own, nevertheless participated in the enterprise indirectly as settlers in these colonies, as traders/shippers and as champions of pseudo-scientific studies that aimed at proving the supremacy of the white race (Rastas 2012; Naum and Nordin 2013). Furthermore, Sweden and Denmark who were then the only Nordic independent states participated in the Berlin conference of 1884–85 that partitioned Africa. They briefly held colonies in the Gold Coast

(present-day Ghana) and were also active in transatlantic trade and race-driven sciences (Naum and Nordin 2013; Palmberg 2009; McEachrane 2014).

It is then fair to say that Nordic countries were captured by the lures of colonialism the desire to dominate and exploit that thrives on a belief in cultural and racial superiority –and evidence exists showing that colonial ideologies and Eurocentrism continue to constitute an important part of the sociocultural dynamics that underpin contemporary Nordic societies (Rastas 2012; Palmberg 2009).

Coloniality of knowledge

This is the essence of coloniality: the tendency for the logics of colonialism to insidiously extend well beyond a strictly colonial setting and period (Giraldo 2016, 161). Concerning its role in the global knowledge architecture, coloniality underscores the intricate links that epistemes and paradigms have with colonialism. It speaks to the fact that there exists a racially driven epistemic divide, the boundaries of which are marked by imperial and colonial differences. Hence, Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) assert that the imperial cartography created a 'body-geographic divide' (205) in which certain parts of the world were assigned to certain groups of people who are adjudged to be of high intellectual capabilities and other parts are for those of lesser minds.

In relation to the Nordic-African knowledge relationship, Nordic countries, as part of the West, are to be considered the 'superior others' while Africa is to be considered part of the 'inferior others'. Therefore, the movement of African academics within the Nordic and African HE spaces represents a movement across epistemic and racial divides. This is because the body-geographic divide not only merges knowledge with space with the effect that they derive credence from one other but it also conflates knowledge with the human body to the degree that bodily and racial features are considered indicators of intellectual capabilities. Hence, the participants' framing of position is conditioned by the structure of the global knowledge architecture in which moving from Africa to Nordic academia implies operating from a subaltern epistemic trajectory and, within a context where their bodily features are, at least historically, out of sync with the body-knowledge-space configuration of the imperial map. Hence, a male Sweden-based participant noted:

> People, when they see an African in academia; they will not say it to you directly, but you can feel that they don't think that you can be an academic. You can feel that! Say, there is a guy from Britain or fro the US who is white, or from France, who is also doing research here–they will not treat you equal to them. As an African, they think that perhaps you are good at something else, that perhaps you are good at singing (laughs) and–you know– sports; you should be good at those. But nothing academic! You can feel that –that's my experience, and they will show you in one way or another.

One key implication of this is that those who are viewed as belonging to the inferior part of the knowledge divide always find their knowledge/skills being questioned by the others. Thus, they constantly need to prove themselves at every turn in their careers. A Sweden-based male participant gave his experience of this below:

> I think whether I like it or not, as I said, history played a very big role. A lot of the eugenic-based aspects which led to slavery and colonialism are still there in people's minds, and it is something that is very difficult to take away because it comes with being born. So the negative stereotype is still there even if we do very well. Yes, I go the extra length, especially in my junior career, to maybe work

> double, to be able to show that this does not hold – this is not true. So I am always in a fight against myself based on what I think people believe about me. So if it is about working in a class for three hours, maybe I work for six hours; I always try to make sure that I throw away this kind of bogus theory.

Another Sweden-based (female) participant takes a different perspective to the issue:

> First, I don't think it is anything unique to Africans. I think that it is a general thing that you prove yourself whenever you come into a new place. But secondly, I think there is arrogance on the part of the Western educational system in the idea that being white and having their education makes you superior in the quality of things that you do. I call it arrogance in the sense that they believe that the way things are done in the west is the best and the only way to do things – and I disagree with that. There are some things, which are done in the west, which are good; there are some that are not good – which are not good in terms of the production of knowledge. Thirdly, yes, there is a specific perspective that black Africans in particular do not know what they are doing; they don't understand what it means to be in academia. With regards to my second point, I think it is confusing different traditions of how to address issues – that their way of doing things is the best and only way, that you don't know what you are doing. It is also possible, to some extent, that people who went through higher education in many African universities in the 1980s and early 1990s have missed out on certain important ways of learning. This is because, thanks to the Western arrogance of 'we know it all,' the economies and the educational systems of many African countries went down the drain *[here, the participant is referring to the negative impacts of IMF and World bank policies for Africa]*. For that reason, I expect that there would be a certain range of students who had gone through education that was unfortunately not of very good standard.

The views that are advanced above go with those of Thapar- Björkert and Farahani (2019), as well as Habel (2012). These authors highlight the impact of racialization processes on the production of knowledge. They narrate the othering experiences on non-white Swedish academics and show how white Swedish academics and students exhibit epistemic entitlement and resist and contest experiences and discourses of racialization. These attitudes serve not only to legitimise certain knowledge(s) while devaluing others but also advance the image of who is or is not a knowing subject.

Furthermore, the view that links the negative influence of the World Bank's and IMF's policies on the African HE sector to epistemic imperialism is not unfounded. In fact, critical studies on the World Bank and other multilateral organisations show that the phenomenon of legislating knowledge is implicated in the nature of the relationship that exists between many African countries and these organisations. For example, in their analysis of the World Bank's involvement in Nigeria's educational development, Babalola et al. (2000) describe the Bank's role 'as part of a continuing effort that began during colonialism, in which the West dictated what Africans learned and how it was done' (157). Samoff and Carrol (2004) are also of the view that the World Bank's regimes for partnering with African countries in the area of education creates a system of continued dependency of Africans on Western nations. According to them, the Bank through its ability to frame, organise and orientate the academic enterprise and thus ways of knowing and validating knowledge, is able to maintain its hold on African knowledge systems (Samoff and Carrol 2004, 68).

Working from the fringes

According to Giraldo (2016), coloniality refers to the 'symbolic, invisible and indelible traces of the colonial project that lace institutional cultures' (161, emphasis in the original). These cultures are boundaries of belonging that regulate inclusion into the academy. The extent to which one conforms to these cultures determines how such a person would be welcomed and made comfortable within the institution. Being that the institutional space of the academy is intellectually and culturally white, black bodies and personas hardly fit the norm. As such, black academics often have to contend themselves with being the subaltern others who work from the fringes of the academy. The experiences of the participants suggest that this reality is also applicable to Nordic academia. A Finland-based male participant said the following:

> For me race is a big question here, and I think that if you are coming from Africa, then race is a big deal. For you to get into the system, into the community of practice – it is easier for our colleagues from the West to get into the system or to get into the inner core. You remain in the periphery.

A Norway-based male participant, when asked if race played a role in his career experience, expressed a similar view:

> Of course, I know I'm going to give an answer of which I don't have any proof, but I believe that if I had been white, I would have been pulled into the system in a different way. But not being a Norwegian in terms of skin colour, I feel that I'm kind of kept on the periphery.

The above statements confirm that the view of higher education and the global knowledge production landscape as endemically racialized (Maldonado-Torres 2004; Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006; Mirza 2015) holds true in the Nordic region as well; however, it is worth noting that the participants' experiences are framed by the cultures that underpin the Nordic society in general and academy in particular. About this, the discourse of exceptionalism and race-neutrality that characterise the Nordic identity weaves an antiracist morality into the dominant narratives of Nordic nations and their institutions. This in turn fosters a climate where the raising of issues of racism is taken as an attack on the countries' pride and identity (Sawyer 2002; Svendsen 2014). A major consequence of this is the creation of forced silence on the part of victims of racism. This is evident from the expression below, which is from a Norway-based male participant:

> There are challenges here that sometimes I feel that things are not fair, but you know at this level, even if you have the perception that things are not the way they're supposed to be or maybe somebody is treating you unfairly; what I have learnt is that if you can't prove it, don't mention it – I will not call it a game; they are survival strategies that you have to adopt. You are better off keeping quiet, because, otherwise, you alienate yourself, and that will be worse, and of course, you don't want people to have a view of you as somebody who doesn't accept that he can lose sometimes. So, yeah, I wouldn't say that every time it's like that, but I know that sometimes things could have been different, if I didn't look different, but I am doing well, and again, if you can't prove it, just move on. This is very important. Yes, otherwise it will come to your own total disadvantage, you know, and you don't want to do that because you want to exist among your peers.

While it is easy to attribute situations such as the one described above to nepotism and cliquishness that bedevils academia in general, one cannot deny that the narrative of Nordic exceptionalism plays a role in this since it creates a discursive terrain that makes the ventilation of racial-based inequalities difficult (cf. Habel 2012; Thapar- Björkert and Farahani 2019). Hence, the idea that 'if you can't prove it, don't mention it' is not so much a result of a lack of evidence of discrimination but of a fear of stepping onto slippery discursive terrain by engaging issues of race and postcolonial relationships. In this context, keeping quiet becomes a survival strategy. This view is also reflected in the following statement from a Finland-based participant:

> There is no way that I can compare myself [speaking about career equality]. I must be careful, though, because there is no big issue of inequality and racism because the Finnish society tries very hard to play it safe when it comes to equality. So if there is an open job position and there is me and another person from the West, silently, the opportunity will almost run into the lap of my colleague. Something like a hidden policy? Yes, it's not played out openly. We are all careful not to make noise about it, but we also know that this is how the system works. It's a built-up structure that you cannot break. It is also about power and privileges.

These views are consistent with the wider literature that shows how academics of colour are marginalised, silenced and made invisible by the white supremacy and racism that operates within academia (Johnson and Bryan 2017; Christian 2017; Stockfelt 2018; Mirza 2015). However, some of the study participants link the problem to the prevailing realities within the wider society. For example, a Norway-based male participant points to the racialized public discourse of African immigrants in Norway. He notes: 'Except you go to scientific journals, you will not get to hear about us. Those who they talk about are people who are into prostitution and fraud.' A Finland-based male participant takes a slightly different perspective on this when speaking in reference to Finland:

> In terms of multiculturalism, Finland is a young state. So racism is still very high, but they actually don't know it. Compared to places like the UK and US where Africans have been able to prove themselves. But here based on the name, history and what they know about Africans – those things still play big roles in determining who will be your friend, who would associate with you or not. That is how I see it.

The gender angle

It is worth noting that while the Nordic discourse of equality is largely silent on the issue of race, the opposite applies regarding gender equality (cf. Mählck 2016; Hoffman 2007). Indeed, gender equality is often cited as the flagship feature of the discourse of Nordicness (Sawyer and Habel 2014). As such, effort was made in this study to find out how the Nordic discourse of gender equality colours the participants' views and experiences. Responses to this concern indicate that both male and female participants believe, for two opposing reasons, that the discourse of gender equality does not work to their advantage. The following extract from the conversation between the author and another Finland-based male participant puts this into perspective:

Author: As pertains to matters of equality, how do you, as an African, perceive yourself in relation to other foreign colleagues of non-African origin?

Participant: It is difficult to generalise. Americans in Finland are immigrants, but they get a different kind of treatment. [. . .] I had near misses recently, and though I don't have any evidence, I am beginning to think that my nationality played a role in those misses.

Author: You made it look like there is a continuum of preference and treatments that different nationalities receive; if you should place it in a pecking order, where do Africans belong?

Participant: Africans are way down the ladder. A lot of this has to do with the degree of belief that they have towards Africans. There is still this lack of belief towards Africans, unfortunately, and lack of trust.

Author: How does gender feature in this?

Participant: The global drive for women's rights and gender equality has given women more opportunities to excel. They are encouraged to pursue high-level careers, and the reality now is that people are now more aware of them, and the issue of positive discrimination often works in their favour if they compete for a position with male colleagues. In fact, I believe that if I were a lady, I wouldn't have missed the opportunities that I spoke about earlier. This is just a feeling; I have no proof.

The female participants, on the other hand, consider the narrative of positive discrimination as undermining their capabilities as academics. For example, in response to a question about the possible impact of gender on her migration experiences, a Finland-based female participant said the following:

> I actually don't like this gender thing – if you're a woman, you get things easier. I prefer to beacknowledged for what I did. You know, to get something because I earned it and not because I am a woman. Especially in the field of technology where people will say 'because you are a woman, if you apply for this, you will get it.' I don't agree with that. I want to get it because I am good at it. And, thinking about here and home, there are few women in technology generally, and women are even fewer here than they are back home.

While responding to the same question, a Sweden-based female participant of a more senior rank also emphasised the role of hard work against gender identity in career progression:

> I don't think so *[that gender has any effect on her career]*, and the reason is because I would still be what I want to be despite the gender. It's an internal drive to aspire, and they are all based on part of my life experiences – things I have gone through as an individual, which in a way, probably I would have experienced them if I weren't female. I am talking about my life history back home. But here in Sweden, I don't think my life would have been different because of gender. I have an internal drive.

The importance of projecting the role of effort and capabilities over social attributes such as gender and race is understandable given, as Stockfelt (2018) reports in her study, black female academics often find themselves in situations where they have to contest the negative perception that their success is only attributable to affirmative action and institutional diversity initiatives.

Positioning within the African context

The findings presented below emerged from the participants' responses to questions pertaining to their links with the African higher education space. From the discussion of their links, their

perceptions and their career experiences within the African context, the participants, as in the Nordic context, articulate an outsider position. However, unlike in the Nordic context, they no longer frame their outsider position along racial differences but instead by differences in institutional culture, practices and politics that are embedded in the higher education systems. The following statement from a Sweden-based female participant is illustrative of this:

> You see, I wanted to go back when I finished my PhD here. I applied to my former university. The head of the department said, 'Fantastic! We are waiting for you to come. We are happy to have you. Just wait for a formal letter and then you can come back.' What happened was that there was someone else whom I have nothing to do with. He was my junior, and though he was around when Iwas there, therewas nothing between him and me. He went to the vice-chancellor (VC) of the university to say 'Don't take her.' I still don't know why. I went through the right channel, which is the head of the department, but he went to the VC– but that's how things work there. So I didn't get the job. I never got the letter. When I went home this summer, I went looking for him in the department to ask him why he objected, but I didn't find him (laughter). I have not tried again since then. But I feel that I owe that university something. So if I see a way that I can contribute, I will go back and contribute.

Another issue that is evident from the participants' responses is their projection of their self-agency within the African context. In other words, despite their outsider status, the participants see themselves as occupying a position of power – at least, relative to the Nordic context. They are not the weak and marginalised outsiders but concerned outsiders looking to succour a bad situation. As can be understood from the above quotation, phrases like wanting 'to help.' 'to contribute' and 'to offer' are frequently used by participants in reference to African universities. While there are many ways in which this can be interpreted, it is difficult to contest the fact that one needs to be in a position of relative advantage to be able to offer help or to make a contribution. Upon a more critical analysis, this not only reveals how power is played out within the academy, especially in the context of internationalization, but it is also indicative of the embeddedness of imperialistic and colonial ideologies in contemporary academic practices. This reality is not limited to the knowledge production sites of the West and within the context of White-Black knowledge relationships, but on the contrary, it also finds expression within the African higher education space and in intra-African knowledge relationships. This is evident from the evident from the self-perception of the participants as the superior others. The statement below is by a Norway-based male participant and underscores this sense of superiority:

> [. . .] the mentality of the people that call themselves professors is terrible. And, to be honest, with all due respect, many of them shouldn't have been that – shouldn't have had that title because they don't have the qualification, you know, they simply do not merit it, many of them, because they simply don't know so much [edited to ensure confidentiality].

This supposed superiority is not just a matter of knowledge content but also of culture and sociality, as can be inferred from the following statement from a Sweden-based male participant:

> The problem is that we really have a very strong hierarchy back at home. Because you find that, especially in Sweden, we really have quite a flat institutional system

> that – yeah, your boss, you can always just call him, 'Hi John.' At home, it will be: 'Oh! Professor can I have word with you?' Even if you just want to say good morning (laughs), he more or less has to permit you.

Notwithstanding the contestability of the claims in the above statements – the claim that Africa-based professors are hardly qualified to be so is, to say the least, very questionable, and rank-driven interaction is not limited to the African higher education setting; professors in Western academia also flex their authority in the context of normal everyday interaction – the point that is to be noted from the statements is that, relative to their African-based colleagues, the participants' positioning as the superior others thrives on the perceived superiority of one culture over another. This position is, however, linked to coloniality, because if colonialism is the primary force behind western epistemic and cultural superiority (Mignolo 2002, 2013; Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006), all things being equal, it follows that those with links to western academia carry this aura of superiority in their dealings with others. The role of the body-knowledge-space configuration is also at work here, for being in affiliation with Nordic academia, the participants' dark skin has become, if not physically, at least metaphorically lightened and their knowledge loftier than that of their Africa-based colleagues. This is because the position of the West as
a privileged epistemic site 'rubs off' on those with links to it. Hence, the participants carry this privilege with them in their relationship with their Africa-based colleagues.

At this point, it is worth noting the place of economic and financial resources as an integral part of the patterns of power and privilege that lace the global higher education space. For example, Africa-based academics are still overworked and underpaid and government funding still falls short of globally accepted standards; hence, the continued dependence on western assistance (Leibowitz et al. 2014; Attieh 2003). In other words, beyond the epistemic privilege that comes from their affiliation with western universities, the prevailing context of need and privation adds to the valorisation of western-based African academics as the superior others within the African higher education space. In the absence of research grants for Africa-based academics, they have possibility of being drafted into research projects abroad by western-based African academics. Furthermore, the western-based African academics have access to publications and research facilities that are beyond the reach of their Africa-based colleagues, and in an atmosphere where studies originating from Africa-based researchers are treated with suspicion, collaborating with western-based academics lends credibility to studies originating from Africa-based academics.

Concluding thoughts

This article set out to address particular concerns raised by the current wave of the internationalization of HE. It argues that beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of the global HE landscape are the effects of history, or to be more specific, colonialism. Through colonialism, the global geography of knowledge became historically structured along the lines of colonial and imperial differences. The West being the 'superior others,' and having linked their knowledge system to their economic system (Mignolo 2002), the relative position of any HE system has come to depend largely on which side of the colonial divide they are situated on and to what extent their economies have been grafted onto the western capitalist system. Though this reality has always been present throughout the history of HE, recent developments in the field have increased its importance as an opportunity-structuring factor in contemporary academic careers.

Using the African-Nordic knowledge relationship as a case in point, this article advances the argument that belonging to either side of the colonial divide has become, one could say, one of the main stakes around which present-day academics position themselves and

are positioned. The article uses the idea of a body-knowledge-space configuration not only to serve as a description of the reality of the geographic divide that conflates and fuses knowledge with space and bodily appearance, but as a framework for position-taking in knowledge relationship settings. It also underscores how coloniality transcends colonial divides and produces complex forms of advantage and disadvantage for different peoples at different times and places.

Though this article examines how coloniality structures the ways Nordic-based academics position themselves within Nordic and African HE spaces, its emphasis is largely on how this operates within the Nordic context. Furthermore, while individuals naturally respond to incentives – and the lures of coloniality are such incentives that are difficult to resist (Mulinari et al. 2009) – nevertheless individuals' reactions to an incentive are not always similar, nor is the mechanism through which an individual decides how to respond to an incentive straightforward. All these underscore the need for further studies on this subject that would give more detailed attention to how coloniality operates within societies in the South, especially African society, and that apply an intersectional framework to study how coloniality operates at individual levels within the academia.

This said, the point to bear in mind is that imperialism has continued to the present day 'in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices' (Said 1993, 9). Hence, as the spaces of HE become increasingly internationalized and multicultural, it should be remembered that these are not unstructured spaces, nor are they peopled by neutral epistemic subjects whose only commitment is to a disinterested pursuant of knowledge. This article attests to this. It shows the continued influence of structures and sentiments that emerged from colonialism on knowledge production/relationships that take place within the context of internationalization. And while the article only sampled the views and experiences of twenty-five African academics in the employment of Nordic universities and institutions, the hope is that paying attention to individual scholars' accounts of their experiences within specific contexts will help throw into relief key debates about the broader practices and politics surrounding transnational academic careers in a global context.

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