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Promises and Challenges of Collaborative Teaching: Crossing Cultural and Academic Boundaries

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Promises and Challenges of Collaborative Teaching: Crossing Cultural and Academic Boundaries

Sela K. Adjei & Douglas J. Falen

This is a retrospective essay about the experience of collaborative teaching across cultural and academic boundaries. The authors reflect on their miscommunication and the process of reconciliation as a model for the promises and challenges of decolonial collaboration. While obstacles remain to collaboration between African scholars and those in other countries, the authors argue that an open-minded approach allowing for vulnerability and personal growth presents a hopeful option for overcoming barriers and exposing students to new ways of learning in the face of enduring inequalities and differences. The authors offer an account of the history of their interactions, beginning with some uncomfortable exchanges and failed collaboration, but leading to more encouraging, collaborative teaching and scholarly endeavors that give them hope for centering African perspectives, challenging hierarchies, and providing meaningful learning to students in Africa and Europe/North America.

Keywords: Africa, collaborative teaching, decoloniality, pedagogy, remote learning

Since the start of the Covid pandemic, remote teaching has been a mixed blessing for academia. Although faculty and students are often frustrated with the muted interactions and the social disconnection that can accompany online instruction, many in higher education also recognize that remote teaching presents an opportunity for bringing people together in new pedagogical relations. Based on our experiences, we feel that remote instruction opens up possibilities for collaborative transnational teaching, and in particular for advancing the ideals of decolonizing academia. Despite the challenges of instructors working across racial, cultural, and educational differences, we argue that transnational collaborative teaching is a worthwhile endeavor because it requires instructors and students to move beyond their personal and professional comfort zones in the interest of decolonizing our disciplines and the academy. As we show, the relationships between people and academics in Europe/North America and Africa can be charged and complicated, but this only illustrates the important and necessary work that must be done across these lines. This essay offers an account of the history of our own interactions, beginning with some uncomfortable exchanges, but leading to more encouraging, collaborative teaching and scholarly endeavors that give us hope for the possibility of breaking down barriers, centering

African perspectives, challenging enduring hierarchies, and providing meaningful learning to students in Africa and Europe/North America.

The two of us first met in 2019, after Doug (Douglas J. Falen), a scholar of Benin, was invited to deliver a conference presentation on West African Vodu(n) religion. In the interest of decolonizing the field, Doug was encouraged to co-author the piece with an African scholar. Doug was embarrassed to realize that he did not have anyone in mind, so he reached out to some colleagues and received a recommendation to connect with Sela (Sela K. Adjei), an artist and visual anthropologist who has done fieldwork on Vodu(n) in Ghana. After exchanging emails and agreeing to collaborate on the project, we set to work. What followed was a frantic and awkward collaboration that led to bruised feelings and an echo of the colonial hierarchies that we were ostensibly endeavoring to combat. Over a year later, we reconciled and began exchanging ideas, sharing scholarly perspectives, and co-teaching some class sessions.

In this essay, we reflect on our collaboration and the promises of sustained scholarly and pedagogical partnerships. In preparing to write this commentary, we interviewed each other, and in the spirit of experimenting with new forms of transparency, co-authorship, and collaboration, we include in this essay some of our responses to the interview questions.

The Conference Abstract

Our story began with an attempt to propose a presentation for the 2019 meetings of the African Studies Association, but with only two days to complete the abstract. In the draft abstract, Sela provided a critique of some established (white) scholars in the field. In editing the abstract, Doug, pressed for time, removed a key sentence containing that critique and failed to offer any justification. Hurt and angry, Sela withdrew from the project, and Doug was also forced to abandon the presentation.

> **Sela:** What do you think made me lose interest in collaborating with you the first time, and was there any reasonable justification for my negative reaction to our failed collaboration?
>
> **Doug:** I think you felt offended and dismissed because I had made some edits to our conference abstract without discussion or explanation. This was probably exacerbated because you had critiqued some writers for what you considered to be racist scholarship, and in deleting those passages, I was silencing your voice and your critiques. This made me appear to be protecting the work of racists and placing myself into their camp. For my part, I had a range of emotions when I received your angry response. Initially I was hurt as well, as I felt that my actions were not intended to silence you or defend a particular position. I considered your reaction to be emotional and disproportionate to the error, and I was offended at being so quickly

> lumped into the category of 'racist' when I thought I was trying to assert an objective approach to Vodu(n). However, after taking additional time for reflection, I recognized how repeated slights and exclusions could generate frustration for someone who already felt as if academia was biased against you. Ultimately, I came to see your reaction of outrage and condemnation as entirely reasonable and understandable. I wish we had taken more time to discuss the abstract and our goals for the presentation, and to share our views of the scholarship we were addressing. And because we did not know each other prior to that effort, we had no common ground and had not built trust. But in the end, it was probably my own blind spot to how these issues affected you that had contributed to my carelessness.

This failed interaction highlights not only the historical power imbalances between Euro-American and African scholars, but also the way professional and personal sensibilities are intertwined. As we see, an important aspect of Sela's scholarship is correcting and re-centering the extant scholarship on Vodu(n) in particular, and representations of Africa more generally. For Doug, the experience demonstrates how white scholars like him from North America may adhere to standards of 'objectivity,' which ultimately allow them to support colonial scholarly traditions that avoid or silence the issues raised by activist scholars. Hiding behind a purported quest for 'objectivity,' or avoiding what they call an 'emotional' response, often serves as an excuse for failing to tackle injustices or correct wrongs.

Frustration and Separation

Although Doug sent a couple of emails containing a combination of apology and defense, Sela's feelings were too raw, and he saw no further need to respond. Sela pondered over the issue for another long period and simply could not contemplate collaborating with a fellow scholar who failed to acknowledge the historical trajectory of epistemic violence in Vodu(n) scholarship that Sela had tried to highlight in the proposed conference abstract. Sela's spirit felt crushed. As a result, he was hesitant to work with Doug again. A few chapters in Sela's doctoral research (2019) were premised on tackling and undoing centuries of epistemic violence in Vodu(n) scholarship. This included offering a scathing critique of the very same scholar Doug had unconsciously 'shielded.' In one of their final email exchanges which gave Sela much clarity on the kind of issue he was being confronted with, Doug candidly expressed how emotions and personal interests could obstruct how we constructed and processed knowledge. It was obvious Doug was quite familiar with the scholars in his own academic circles and had had an earlier 'not-so-friendly' encounter with the same scholar whose ideas Sela was criticizing. Though Doug did not mention this, Sela got a sense that his critique had been promptly deleted without discussion because it would have been misread as a personal affront to said scholar, further escalating

the situation for Doug to deal with on his end, long after their collaborative presentation. Doug's actions, in Sela's view, reflected an unconscious and internalized reflex that inadvertently preserved hegemonic epistemological structures within Western academic institutions. Sela's interpretation of Doug's response was accurate, because, though Doug was willing to include critical perspectives in a presentation that allowed the space to contextualize it, he was uncomfortable using confrontational language directed at a senior scholar in a conference abstract.

This whole experience reminded Sela of a forward that Walter Mignolo had written recounting a familiar hegemonic trend in Western scholarship over the centuries. In the forward to Hamid Dabashi's (2015) book *Can Non-Europeans Think?,* Mignolo (2015) reflected on how Santiago Zabala's (2013) essays on Slavoj Žižek intersected with Dabashi's (2013) original essay that had inspired the book. Mignolo (2015) stresses how Dabashi (2015) picked up, in the first paragraph of Zabala's essays on Žižek, an unconscious dismissal that has run through the history of the coloniality of power in its epistemic and ontological spheres: the self-assumed Eurocentrism described and mapped from European perspectives and interests. Prior to this observation, Gayatri Spivak's (1988) essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* and Edward Said's (1988) *Orientalism* had challenged the entire intellectual community to accommodate multiple voices to reorient their mind in the manner in which non-Western cultures were observed and documented. In *Yurugu*, Marimba Ani (1994) deconstructed the ideological structures that supported white supremacy and boldly challenged Western intellectual hegemony. Similarly, Frantz Fanon's (2004 [1961]) *The Wretched of the Earth* served as a precursor in the decolonization toolkit for colonized territories in all aspects (political, epistemological, cultural, and psychological decolonization). In it, Fanon (2004) diagnoses epistemic trauma in African people while prescribing 'decolonization' as an act that 'triggers a ...psycho-affective equilibrium' in the pursuit of new humanism and humanity (p. 148). His Africana critical theory—which envisions philosophy in relation to humanities and social sciences as a means to social transformation—proposed a new humanism and humanity founded on decolonization, thus moving beyond Eurocentric ideals of humanity.

Several decades on, despite the widespread campaign and advocacy of decolonizing knowledge and academic institutions (see Asante 2000; Carter et al. 2021; Cossa 2021; Falola 2022; Mbembe 2021; Wiredu 1998; Zeleza 2021), Western scholarship still lacks a firm grasp of intellectual diversity and is devoid of the multiplicity of voices in shaping how we view and address global issues affecting humanity. In José Cossa's (2021) Cosmo-uBuntu philosophy, this notion of the center, mainframe, or a one-dimensional lens or 'box' through which knowledge production is framed is replaced with a multi-disciplinary approach to justice in education. This effort represents a wakeup call for non-Western scholars to delink from hegemonic knowledge regimes, imposed cultural narratives, and racist knowledge production methods. What Cossa essentially argues in the Cosmo-uBuntu

philosophy is the dismantling and decentering of hegemonic educational frameworks. Cossa presents this philosophy as a non-discriminatory and non-hierarchical approach to understanding humanity that derives from the African uBuntu cosmology, which is described in the motto: 'A person is a person because of, or unto, other persons.' Cossa proposes a simple thought experiment with his 'metaphor of the box' (Cossa 2020): he asks his audience to imagine a box and the vast space surrounding it. This one-dimensional metaphoric box represents modernity; the surrounding space is the world exterior to modernity's direct total influence. The box and the outer space are central to our interrogation and understanding of citizen, citizenship, global community, and global citizenship because these concepts, according to Cossa, convey and perpetuate a binary sense of insider/outsider persons, center/peripheral persons, and emerge out of a colonial reality of who is and who is not a human. Citizens are humans who live within the confines of the rights reserved for humans; noncitizens or aliens are lesser than humans who live outside the confines of the rights reserved for citizens. So, Cosmo-uBuntu is the voluntary embracing of uBuntu as a foundational value system to reassert our full, respectable citizenship as humans (Cossa 2018, 2020, 2021, 2022).

Sela and Doug's interaction over the conference presentation reproduced the hegemonic exclusions and hierarchies that Cossa—and Sela—have been working against independently. Moreover, they contributed to a continued divide and a sense of incompatibility. After the failed collaboration, Doug was crushed, feeling guilty for his poor handling of the situation, and devastated by the thought that he had recreated a colonial encounter. Sela felt his efforts had been undone. Sela's sensitive ego felt bruised, and he overreacted in his long, angry email, questioning Doug about why he was 'shielding' scholars whose racist notions of Vodu(n) Sela had critiqued. Sela reflected deeply on their failed collaboration and shared the experience with a trusted academic mentor who encouraged him to ignore such issues and grow another layer of thickness on his skin to be able to withstand the inevitable misunderstanding in self-expression and in the knowledge production process itself. Sela had just emerged from a stressful doctoral program at the time and had very little patience to tolerate any racist inclinations, having read and disputed all the mind-numbing colonial era texts he had reviewed for his dissertation. Coming from an African Studies background, Sela was fully aware of the racially charged nature of ideological clashes between Western and non-Western scholars, but he acknowledged being quite inexperienced in dealing with such a tense collaboration with political undertones. He equally felt a deep sense of personal guilt because his actions and emotional response to the situation went against the Zen and Stoic principles he had earlier studied and to which he adhered.

Over a year later, still nursing feelings of shame and grief, Doug made another effort at reconciliation. He emailed Sela to apologize and asked if he would consider exchanging ideas. To his surprise and delight, Sela graciously accepted the apology, and since then we have corresponded

regularly. Doug sent Sela a copy of his book on Vodu(n) (Falen 2018), and we began a regular correspondence thereafter.

Sela: What pushed you to take the radical decision to make that very last effort to reach out to collaborate again, even though I completely tuned out after our failed collaboration?

Doug: In the immediate aftermath of our failed collaboration, I sent an email to apologize for my clumsy and insensitive decisions, by explaining that I was making hurried edits at midnight before a deadline and that I had not intended to ignore your critiques. After receiving no response from you, I realized that my apology probably rang hollow and sounded defensive. For weeks afterwards, I felt sick with guilt and was so disturbed that I had trouble sleeping. I may have sent another email during this time to apologize again but still never received a reply. This experience continued to haunt me for another year, and it was one of the great regrets of my life up to that point. This is why I took another chance to reach out. I came to see our encounter as both a personal and professional failing, and even as emblematic of the inequalities that I had committed to combat. I thought that if I did not make the effort to overcome our differences, I would be surrendering to the idea that racial, national, or other differences were insurmountable. As an anthropologist, I refuse to believe that people live in utterly incommensurable worlds, or that they cannot find common ground through good-faith efforts. That's why I made that last attempt to reach you. I was delighted when you answered and agreed to engage in dialogue.

Doug: After our initial failed collaboration, what made you change your mind and agree to begin communicating with me a year later?

Sela: I think it's the newfound respect I developed for you after your relentless effort to reach out to me again and genuinely acknowledge the problems we had encountered during our initial attempts to collaborate. How you candidly expressed an appreciable level of remorse and made that final request for us to start collaborating again with a clean slate. After nearly a year, I had forgotten the whole issue, I wouldn't have guessed you'd ever reach out again, so I was quite moved. At that point, it no longer mattered to me who was right or wrong, I was more concerned with who was trying to make peace. You made the reconciliatory move, and I appreciate your efforts. Thanks.

Joint Teaching

As a first effort to build a bridge and work together, Doug invited Sela as a guest lecturer, via Zoom, for his global learning seminar, entitled 'Race and the Other,' during the fall 2021 semester. The class was about racial constructions and postcolonial relationships between former colonial and colonized

nations. Sela gladly accepted the invitation, presenting four lectures on the following topics: 1) skin-bleaching practices in Ghana; 2) artistic depictions of colonizers; 3) racial mimesis in Vodu(n) religious iconography; and 4) an anti-racist philosophy in African music videos. These lectures were an opportunity for students to hear directly from a scholar residing in Africa about topics that were important to him and that reflected his perspective on racial identity and hierarchy. The centering of the experiences and perspectives of someone from a formerly colonized country is precisely the mission of decolonial teaching. Students told Doug that they appreciated Sela's contributions, hearing different points of view, and learning from Sela's unique perspective. One student noted that they especially appreciated when there were group discussions involving both Sela and Doug. We both discovered that we shared a number of similar interests and concerns (such as racial inequality, hegemonic power, problematic portrayals of Africans, resistance, and music). Through sustained dialogue and collaboration, our interactions helped us to appreciate one another, recognize our shared humanity, and build respect and trust. We also re-initiated our failed collaboration by presenting a co-authored paper together at the African Studies Association conference in November 2022 and are currently finishing an article we have written together. The collaborative teaching also inspired us to imagine more substantive co-teaching, which would ideally include jointly designing course content and providing more meaningful long-term interactions in which instructors, as well as students, work together. In 2023, we participated in a workshop sponsored by the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) initiative, learning to co-design collaborative courses. Then in spring 2024, we carried out our plan by co-teaching a month-long COIL module that connected students at Sela's and Doug's home institutions, which allowed our students to interact and work together on common projects. In recent comments, some of Doug's students recounted that this collaborative course was one of the most challenging, interesting, and memorable courses in their four years of college.

Doug: Did you benefit from the opportunity to visit my class? How?

Sela: Definitely, co-teaching with you was worth it. The knowledge-sharing was mutually beneficial. For me, it was quite rewarding and insightful in a sense that I felt a deep level of appreciation not only from you, but from the students as well. I was also rewarded with a decent honorarium for each lecture.

Doug: Has the collaborative teaching experience changed your teaching strategy?

Sela: I would say it has not really changed my teaching strategy but improved and broadened my understanding of collaborative teaching and the many positive opportunities it presents. Our racial and educational backgrounds also introduced renewed perspectives of the various topics we chose to discuss.

The positive feedback your students gave after my final presentation showed how my thoughts and contributions were valued. It gave me interesting ideas for developing more effective collaborative teaching strategies to nurture new minds.

Our collaborative teaching was limited by certain technical and logistical challenges. Among these were internet disruptions, classroom camera placement, poor audio, and the difficulty of scheduling synchronous meetings across distant time zones (in addition to the problem of reverting from daylight-savings to standard time in the middle of the semester). Some of these difficulties are unavoidable, but they could be mitigated with planning.

Decolonizing Academia

There are pedagogical strategies for decolonizing academia, such as including readings, theories, and perspectives from formerly colonized nations and other marginalized groups. However, we argue that team-teaching is another useful approach that builds on the notion that direct and sustained contact between peoples can bridge divides, generate respect, and potentially disrupt the colonial hierarchies within academia.

Doug: Have our interactions changed your view of academia, and of decolonial possibilities?

Sela: Not precisely. I'm very much aware of the endless possibilities of collaborative teaching, research, and the intellectual pursuit of decolonizing hegemonic academic regimes. Early in my own research journey, I encountered important publications by Kwasi Wiredu (1995) and Birgit Meyer (2012), both of whom have been keen advocates of renewed perspectives, anthropological paradigm shifts, practical approaches and methodologies for trans-disciplinary and collaborative research, specifically in conceptual decolonization, philosophy, art, and material religion. I'm currently collaborating with Birgit Meyer and a host of other European scholars on a number of research projects that aim at harmonizing and bridging the academic gap between scholars in the West and scholars based in Africa. You are not the first American scholar I've collaborated with. Over the last decade I've also encountered and collaborated with several non-African scholars like Bea Lundt, Meera Venkatachalam, Curtis Andrews, Jill Flanders, Matthew Rarey, Lucien Loh, Yann LeGall, and I've interacted with Walter Mignolo in a virtual seminar on decolonization. I can see that Western scholars are becoming more aware of the dangers of 'theorizing from the West.' Perhaps the reverberating sounds from the 'academic echo chamber' are creating a boring monotonous sound in the ears of discerning scholars. This repetition has pushed many to seek fresh, dialogical approaches that center marginalized epistemologies instead of defaulting to

the same narrow framework. In the last few decades, there's been a gradual shift, and impartial scholars are able to spotlight biases, epistemic violence, and inadequacies that have been normalized within academic institutions. For instance, I recently met Bénédicte Savoy, an art historian who applies what she refers to as 'factivism' in her provenance research to educate and overturn narrow-minded perceptions among her Western peers concerning the restitution of looted African artworks illegally held in European museums. Radical approaches to levelling academic fields already paved the way for collaborative decolonial possibilities between Western scholars and scholars of African descent. So, I would say our interaction has merely expanded my outlook of decolonial possibilities in different directions.

Doug: What theories or ideals do you think we share or don't share?

Sela: It's interesting that our ideals and academic pursuits are too similar for us to be misunderstanding each other or engaging in any personal intrigue. You teach about race, racism, colonial aftershock, and other inequalities in all your courses, and critical race theory (CRT) is equally fundamental to your pedagogy. The negative impact of racism and white terror domination are central to the theoretical frameworks your pedagogy is hinged on. Apart from being a researcher interested in these same issues, I focus my professional art practice on racial inequality, police brutality, black power, and resistance against oppressive regimes like white terror domination. I would say the ideals we share lie in dismantling the hegemonic structures that reinforce various kinds of inequalities across the globe. We need more collaboration and understanding because of our shared research interests in Vodu(n), anthropology, critical race theory, and the decentering of hegemonic knowledge systems.

Sela: Would you say you've had a paradigm shift about the 'positionality' of Western scholars in the 'hierarchy' of knowledge production in academia?

Doug: While I have grown from this experience, I would not describe it as a paradigm shift in my views of academia or my theoretical approach. My anthropological training and my interactions with scholars and students had already shaped my understanding of hierarchies in academia and beyond. I have participated in workshops on decolonial pedagogies, and my teaching and scholarship endeavor to valorize the ideas and perspectives from Africa. Although I was not as familiar with postcolonial thought and theories during my graduate training, over the course of my career, my teaching and scholarship have been profoundly shaped by the works of people like Edward Said (1978), Lila Abu-Lughod (2013), Frantz Fanon (2008 [1952]), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988), Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), Filomina Chioma Steady (2002), Jemima Pierre (2012), and Johannes Fabian (2014 [1983]). However, there is a difference between teaching decolonial theory in the abstract, and the lived experience

and ethical choices inherent in human interaction. For me, the experience of making a personal mistake and seeing how quickly even well-intentioned and theoretically educated people can offend others by silencing their voices and recreating colonial hierarchies was profound and eye-opening.

These uncomfortable moments are some of the most productive learning opportunities, both for us and for our students. Learning about abstract concepts of decolonial thought must be paired with interactions and practical applications of these ideals. Our goal of engaging in decolonizing collaborative teaching merges with the benefits of student collaboration (Surr et al. 2018) and builds on evidence that immersive collaborations between professionals helps to promote anti-racist ideas (Cahn 2020).

Sela: What has this whole experience taught you about collaborative teaching with scholars from different racial, social, cultural, and intellectual backgrounds?

Doug: This experience has reaffirmed that people can establish meaningful connections and understanding across racial, social, national, and other divides. This is the explicit mission and promise of anthropology, but in many ways, it is the goal of all the liberal arts. Ideally, learning is more than the acquisition of facts; it means encountering new ideas and sometimes having experiences that make one uncomfortable, prompting one to think in new ways. But as ethnographic fieldwork demonstrates, deep learning usually requires long-term contact and interaction with others. This is why I am interested in additional collaborative teaching opportunities, especially those involving jointly designed and jointly taught courses, rather than merely an occasional guest lecture. Interacting with you and hearing how much my students appreciated learning your perspectives leads me to think that a fully collaborative teaching effort holds the promise of bringing together instructors and their students, sharing ideas and breaking down the racial and colonial barriers that continue to shape the world.

Doug: What has this experience taught you about collaborative teaching with scholars from different racial, social, cultural and intellectual backgrounds?

Sela: This experience offered me a rare glimpse of the emotional and political weight we carry into collaborative spaces, especially when those spaces are shaped by deep-seated inequalities in academic recognition, disciplinary hierarchies, and historical wounds. It has shown me that while shared values and intellectual interests provide a strong foundation, meaningful collaboration requires patience, trust, and a willingness to sit with discomfort—both one's own and that of others. Our initial miscommunication revealed our individual trajectories of academic expression and differing thresholds of what was considered acceptable critique, especially in relation to power and race. Working through that rupture—and witnessing your effort to reach out after

so long—helped me understand that real collaboration sometimes required one to dispassionately confront uncomfortable feelings. It's about choosing to stay in the conversation, even when things fall apart.

Having the opportunity to speak directly to your students, to share my own thinking about art, religion, and racial politics, and to hear their questions and reflections, gave me a sense of awareness that co-teaching across differences could humanize abstract debates and create openings that no textbook could achieve on its own. I learned that my own expectations and frustrations, however justified, had to be carefully examined—so that I could remain open to reconciliation. That process, though difficult, was a great learning curve that was deeply therapeutic. It forced me to revisit my own assumptions, especially about how quickly or easily trust could be built or broken.

Ultimately, this collaboration has affirmed that intellectual humility and mutual respect are core human values—essential to the practice of scholarship, especially in cross-cultural settings and multi-racial learning environments. I must admit that I have become more attentive to the fragility and possibility of shared work. I can now understand how collaborative work in academia can unsettle fixed positions and introduce new concepts for understanding one another. If we are serious about decolonizing our disciplines, we must be willing to move beyond our individual differences to genuinely do this work together, again and again, even when it is uncomfortable. Most especially, when it really feels unsettling, that's the new learning ground for us all.

Conclusion

What we propose in this essay is a modest, first step in the effort to generate meaningful collaboration and respect between scholars and students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Our experiences do not suggest that the work of decolonizing academia will be quick or easy. Indeed, our own transformations have been incremental and represent less of a paradigm shift than a tentative optimism for the possibilities to come. To be sure, divisions along disciplinary, theoretical, racial, and class lines will remain significant obstacles among the most well-intentioned instructional partners, but there is genuine reason for hope. In our interactions, we have attempted to practice humility and introspection, while applying Cosmo-uBuntu philosophical principles, which recognize alternative knowledge systems and non-Western frames of reference. In this spirit, our experimental approach here, involving a non-traditional format of humanistic interviewing, reflects our efforts to decenter traditional ways of knowing. We argue that these techniques can contribute to decolonizing academia.

In a nutshell, this whole experience exposed Doug's and Sela's fallibility as scholars who both acknowledged their intellectual shortcomings and agreed to put their misunderstandings behind them to focus on

more productive intellectual ventures. This encounter was a great learning experience for Sela because it presented a clear picture of the challenges, endless opportunities and promises of collaborative teaching irrespective of age, class, race, gender, rank, or intellectual abilities. In Sela's view, scholars can learn from each other if they put their personal interests and ideological differences aside and focus on collaborative teaching and knowledge-sharing hinged on mutual respect. For Doug, the experience has been an important part of his learning process, building new sensitivities to the ethical considerations of working across national, disciplinary, and racial differences. Although the goal of lifelong learning has always involved acquiring new 'knowledge,' Doug has grown in the domain of interpersonal understanding and reflexivity. In particular, he has become more sensitive to the pain felt by Sela and others whose cultures have been described and dissected by scholars from Europe and North America.

In an era where critical race theory is currently under attack in the American educational system, collaborative teaching and knowledge-sharing has become an imperative pedagogical intervention in global institutions with racial diversity and multicultural demographics. Yael Sharan (2010) has argued that putting collaborative teaching and learning into practice creates a culturally sensitive pedagogy and cooperative learning environment, where learning is made relevant for all. Taking the bold decision to co-author this essay on our experience presented both Doug and Sela with an opportunity to create more racial awareness and to acknowledge the various forms of inequalities plaguing the global academic community. But it has also given us new energy and hope for future collaborations and mutually beneficial learning experiences for our students.

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