BOOK REVIEW
Walter Lepore, Budd *L.* Hall and Rajesh Tandon *Bridging Knowledge Cultures. Rebalancing Power in the Co-Construction of Knowledge,* Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2024, 313 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-68774 (pbk)

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The book is structured across five framing chapters (three introductory, two concluding) and ten case study chapters. The volume adds to the body of knowledge(s) through the documentation of efforts in bridging knowledge cultures, insights into diverse cultures. It also provides a framework for understanding community-academic engagement, examples of best practice and challenges, applicable methodologies, and valuable critical pedagogical insights. It brings together findings from the work of the Bridging Knowledge Cultures (BKC) project (2020 – 2022), "an international partnered training and research initiative of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education", working on UN Sustainable Development Goals through training hubs located around the world, and under the auspices of the Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium (Lepore et al, p. 6).[9]

The volume's aim is to diversify sources of knowledge, towards achieving knowledge democracy that counters "the near monopoly of Eurocentric knowledge systems or the exclusion of experiential or Indigenous knowledges" (Lepore et al, p. 9). It aligns with other efforts to decolonise knowledge production (Smith, 1999; Akena, 2012), and

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[9] All undated references are to chapters in the book under review.

moreover contributes additional insights through focused and detailed community case studies, where practice informs analysis. Alongside case studies, the book also provides a robust theoretical framework, which is flexible enough to accommodate heterogeneity.

Participatory research is persuasively identified as the best route towards bridging knowledge cultures, "as it places collective knowledge at the heart of processes of social transformation and social justice" (Lepore et al, p. 10), engaging with timely concerns. It further develops the continuing long-term project undertaken by the editors (see e.g. Hall & Tandon, 2017; Munck et al, 2014) towards knowledge decolonisation, and exploring and upholding the potential of participatory community-based research. The research was in many cases student-centred, with students being the primary intended beneficiaries (Wood et al, pp. 187, 196; Flores et al, p. 240; Suriani Dzulkifli et al, p. 276; Yadav et al, p. 127). We also gain helpful insights into course design (Suriani Dzulkifli et al, p. 264). Chapters 14 and 15 offer constructive recommendations, e.g., structurally provided/supported administrative "spaces for shared leadership" (Tandon et al, p. 297; Hall, p. 307).

The volume is a welcome arrival, and seems particularly targeted at educators, social sciences researchers (both within and outside academia), activists, and policy makers; the issues raised are however of wider interest, not least to the communities themselves. The authorship of the book reflects this range, with authors hailing both from within and outside academia, for example members of NGOs involved with Indigenous communities. The book stands as a testament to the importance of recognising that knowledge is "created everywhere" (Lepore et al., p. 3). This is also important because Indigenous knowledges have been threatened with erasure and poorly documented, under colonising and Westernising influences (see e.g. Rwiza et al; Suriani Dzulkifli et al; Lepore and Jenny).

Methodologies were qualitative and practice-based, ranging from focus groups and interviews, to arts-based and participatory sessions, aptly reflecting different types of knowledge transmission (storytelling, creativity, etc). Use and application of knowledge in the communities studied in the volume are closely linked to "everyday life challenges and

expressed as a part of their worldviews", with "community knowledge production and sharing [being] functional and need-based" (Hall, p. 303) – as demonstrated, for example, in the chapter on the Kenjeran fishing community (Naily et al).

Universities and communities operate from different "underlying worldviews" (Hall, p. 304) and knowledge bases. The tendency identified is for training to be more theoretical at universities and more practical in the community (Lepore et al, p. 10; Lortan and Maistry, p. 219; Lepore and Kaul, p. 55). Understanding differences is rightly underlined as crucial (Lepore and Jenni, p. 37; Naily et al, 83; Venugopal et al, p. 109); accompanied by respect for what "cannot be easily understood through a Western lens" (Lepore and Kaul, p. 51). I would have liked to see more reflection on encountering areas of conflicting values, since such reflections may yield practical recommendations on how to navigate these – as one such example of good practice, one chapter offers possible strategies to encourage more gender inclusivity in the Nyerere Hub through further conversations with the Maasai communities, traditionally led by male elders (Rwiza et al, p. 172).

More could have been said in the introductory, framing chapters about what the editors understand by academic culture and values, with reference to ideological underpinnings, to avoid the impression of its being a default benchmark. Some chapters do make reference to investigation of "academic modes of knowledge generation" (Naily et al, p. 68), although this is sometimes equated with a 'scientific' dominant framework, which excludes or neglects other sources of knowledge (e.g. Naily et al, p. 76). Scientific values are however not the only set of values academic institutions espouse; as acknowledged by a number of authors in the volume (e.g. Monk et al; Wood et al; Suriani Dzulkifli et al), they are accompanied by a Westernising and colonial set of values; the global neoliberal and neo-colonial academic marketplace is also a driver of how 'worth' is established. The point is made that the term 'knowledge culture' has been associated with business and organisation practices (Wood et al, p. 185; Lepore and Jenni, p. 21); the neoliberal implications of this could have been more deeply critically interrogated. The desired consequences for academia (other than publications and teaching) could be more effectively explored and explained. As it stands, the benefits

reaped by the universities are often clearer than those gained by the communities (while the community's gains sometimes entrench them in recipient position rather than as actively creative); and Naily et al rightly observe that "further improvements are needed" to work towards "mutual benefit" (p. 82).

The move to decolonise knowledges has had to contend with "the trends of internationalisation and commercialisation" in education and research (Flores et al, p. 233) and the risks of appropriation (Lortan & Maistry, p. 222). Tandon et al set out the issue in the clearest terms, from the viewpoint of Indigenous communities: "Much of academic research has been used to extract information from communities for analysis and publications" (p. 289). Given the hubs' admirable aim to correct this, it would be interesting to read some more reflective commentary on the risks of commodifying such Indigenous knowledges as a research resource, to be repackaged as academic output, and on the steps taken to avoid or mitigate these risks. One way suggested in the volume is to affirm community ownership, such as Naily et al's opting for the term "community-validated" as opposed to the term "scientifically proven" (p. 79). Reconceiving value requires consideration of alternative ways to gauge impact of research by appreciating the process itself, other than publications and impact factor metrics (Suriani Dzulkifli et al, 267-268; Flores et al, 248). This is a vital point highlighted by several entries in the volume.

There is some variation in the relationships covered across Hubs, with varying degrees of participation by the partners. The dominance of the university remains clear across several chapters. Authentic and effective partnership requires equality (Lepore et al, 4; Monk et al, 141), towards being co-researchers (Mutalib et al, p. 96; Monk et al, p. 143). However, as several authors note, there is considerable evidence of persisting inequalities. For example, as many of the authors recognise, it is difficult to move away from the framing of such efforts as 'academic outreach', originating within the academic institutions (e.g. Tandon et al, p. 299: "While outreach is encouraged, 'inreach' is ignored"). The editors and authors are right to highlight this power imbalance as a barrier.

Ultimately, the book emphasises the importance of sustainability, and is about laying the foundations for this. The common good, which motivates a sense of community (Lepore & Kaul, p. 50), is shown to be in the interest of all partners (e.g. finding sustainable solutions to social and environmental issues, such as waste disposal and water management, to give examples from two case studies). The volume takes important steps towards recognising that community knowledge can have a transformative effect on universities and institutions (e.g. Rwiza et al, 159). The conclusion that successful community-university research collaborations work "despite – and not because of – existing policies" (Hall, p. 308) is a sobering one, and compellingly calls for greater efforts from policy-makers. This volume certainly delivers plenty of key insights to encourage and guide other such initiatives, offering us examples of best practice while alerting us to challenges to look out for, and suggesting ways forward.

Acknowledgements

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