

Reflecting on Pluriversal Dialogues on Environmental Ethics: Decolonising Scientific Practice to Build Futures Beyond 'Development'

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Abstract

As global eco-social crises deepen by the day, the hope that "green energy", "sustainable development", "carbon capture" or "geoengineering" and other technofixes will solve the problems reveals itself to be unrealistic. Rather, it is becoming increasingly clear that such fantasies of technological control over nature resemble the same human exceptionalist arrogance that led us into this so-called "Anthropocene" and ultimately provoked the "Intrusion of Gaia". Our ability to imagine and contribute to the unfolding of liveable worlds beyond modern/colonial imageries of "progress" and "development" will depend critically on negotiating and integrating divergent onto-epistemo-ethical perspectives and different positionalities.

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Different notions of 'human', 'non-human', 'nature', 'environment' or 'life' need to be taken into account in our projections of possible and desirable worlds. This requires engaging in equitable, pluriversal dialogues about the impacts we can expect from different ways of worldmaking and ultimately reconsidering our scientific practices accordingly. Our paper provides a brief account of the first Pluriversal Dialogues on Environmental Ethics at the University of Bonn in May 2024. During the event, a transdisciplinary group of 30 academics and practitioners from different world regions engaged in pluriversal dialogues, sharing transition experiences and different conceptions of 'environment', 'ethics', 'life', 'research', 'education' and 'future'. By bringing divergent cosmovisions, worlding practices and positional perspectives into the ivory towers of Science, we aim to counter epistemic violence and trigger a transition towards a decolonial, pluriversal scientific practice and ethos capable of mobilising the full potential of human problem-solving capacities.

Keywords: Pluriversal dialogues, environmental ethics, alternative futures, decolonising practices



Introduction

"I came down from the mountain to the city. It took me many generations. On the long and tortuous road I was forced to take, for the truth was that I lived well in a world that contained everything, I had to suffer fall after fall. I had so many relapses that at the end of the road I fell completely off the mountain, like a hard stone that hit every living and non-living thing that came in my way. I imagine that I killed many beings in my merciless way without even being aware of it, because I arrived with so many bruises and scratches all over my body that I almost lost all my skin. But above all, I was beaten so badly on the head that I lost my memory. (Introductory sentences of "A Dream"/"Un Sueño"; performative reading by Yilson Beltán during the Pluriversal Dialogues on Environmental Ethics in Bonn, 22 May 2024).

Imagine a group of thirty adults at the margins of a large river, playfully taking on the roles of birds, dreams, ancestor spirits. Imagine these people coming together for spiritual practices, carefully ministered by first nation women from Abya Yala at “places of power”, and later on, participating in Forum Theatre sessions, building living “sculptures”, embodying the roles of a jaguar or of Nature during sessions of Systemic Constellations and World Work. Now imagine that these people were participants in an academic event at a renowned German university of excellence. Would that change anything?



Photographs showing participants taking the roles of more-than-human entities.

From 20-24 May 2024, we joined a transdisciplinary group of thirty (30) academics and non-academics from different world regions, with different positionalities and onto-epistemic backgrounds²¹ at the Center for Life Ethics, University of Bonn. Participants were invited to engage in Pluriversal Dialogues on Environmental Ethics and to feel-think about how to decolonise scientific practice and ethos in ways that might enable us to trigger the unfolding of futures beyond Eurocentric visions of “development” and “progress”. During the event we shared practices, experiences and ideas from a variety of contexts and across disciplinary boundaries. A series of talks and workshops²² provided space to experience and reflect on different cosmological notions, ways of knowing and being, performative practices and methodologies from intercultural education, ecological, participatory and action research, gestalt psychology, theatre, creative arts, and other fields. Despite their obvious differences, these diverse practices share the common aim of providing additional ways of co-creating knowledge beyond the limitations of objectivism and without reproducing problematic binaries such as subject vs. object, researcher vs. research-“objects”, mind vs. body, rational vs. emotional, male vs. female, human/culture vs. nature.

By assessing these practical experiences from different disciplinary, positional, cultural and geopolitical perspectives, we aimed to gain deeper insights concerning the potential, viability and challenges of mobilising divergent perspectives to co-create socially and ecologically just and sustainable solutions. In addition, our encounter in Bonn was designed as a kick-off event and seed incubator for joint publications and follow-up projects among the participants.

The event was part of a joint project²³ aiming to counter epistemic violence by decolonising scientific practice and ethos. It was funded and co-organised by a consortium of different institutes at the University of Bonn and with the active participation of the invited participants²⁴.

²¹ Participants included the (7) organising team members from different research institutes at the University of Bonn, (8) invited contributors from Abya Yala, (3) invited contributors from Germany and (14) additional participants from research institutes located in Bonn, however with particularly international and multi-positional backgrounds.

²² See event programme [here: https://www.lifeethics.uni-bonn.de/fileadmin/all_user/img/flyer_poster_programs_etc/pc_bonn2024_programme_detailed_jl_160524.pdf](https://www.lifeethics.uni-bonn.de/fileadmin/all_user/img/flyer_poster_programs_etc/pc_bonn2024_programme_detailed_jl_160524.pdf)

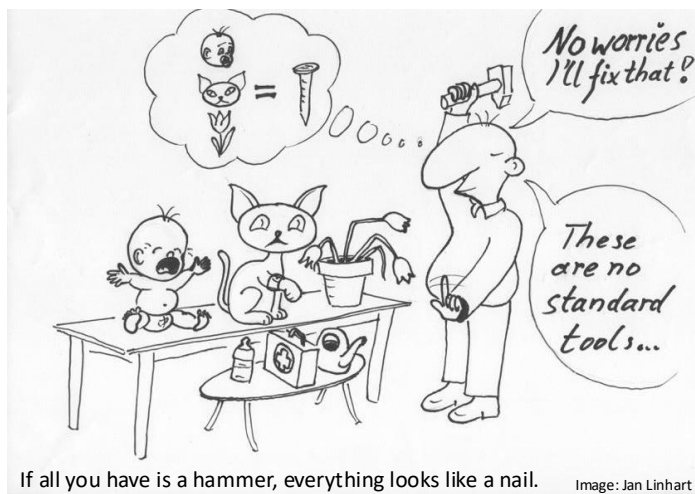
²³ See project website [here: https://www.lifeethics.uni-bonn.de/en/research/towards-pluriversal-dialogues-1](https://www.lifeethics.uni-bonn.de/en/research/towards-pluriversal-dialogues-1).

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Background

Living in the so-called “Anthropocene”, the “human age”, is increasingly being associated with human-made socio-ecological crises and a growing risk of human extinction (D. J. Haraway 2016; Stengers 2015).

To face these challenges, we urgently need to mobilise the full problem-solving capacities of humanity as



a whole, including hitherto dismissed knowledge practices and perspectives from subaltern regions, cultures and intersectional positionalities. Scientific universalism – the notion that “science”²⁵ is the only valid, singular approach to “objective” knowledge of reality - however, rejects any other kind of knowledge unless it conforms to “scientific” norms of knowledge production and underlying metaphysical presuppositions²⁶.

At the same time, evidence from various disciplines and fields of research suggests that modern “science” itself may be reproducing rather than solving the root causes of the socio-

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²⁵ We have put “science” in quotation marks because the term refers to a number of different perceptions and even different things (e.g. “science” as: objective, evidence based knowledge; a set of methods; a knowledge collective with a shared ethos; a set of falsifiable theories; a social institution; social construction of knowledge; a set of historically contingent and socially situated practices; etc. - see, for example, Feyerabend 1980; Merton 1942; Latour 1987; 2001; Kuhn 1970; Stengers 2000; Knorr-Cetina 1981; Harding 1992; D. Haraway 1988). In this paper, modern “science” refers to the institutionalised set of metaphysical suppositions, practices, and ethos that have historically emerged alongside, and been functional for, colonialism, capitalism, and the modern state system. This notion does not ignore the existence of different counter-hegemonic tendencies and critical meta-discourse within modern ‘science’ (of which this paper itself is a good example). However, this openness to internal critique can also be interpreted as part of a liberal legitimacy narrative (Wallerstein, 2006). Although scientific objectivism and universalism have been fiercely attacked by a growing number of scientists, these critiques have not yet attained hegemony within scientific discourse.

²⁶ Wallerstein 2006; Linhart 2025.

ecological and indeed *civilisational crisis*²⁷ that threatens not only humans, but also a range of other species. There is a growing concern about the metaphysics, particularly the implicit dualistic ontology²⁸ that still dominates current scientific theory and practice. By seeking “objective truth” in a world divided into subjects and objects, culture and nature, humans and non-humans, “developed” and “underdeveloped” people and regions, modern “science” tacitly naturalises structural inequalities and legitimises the exploitation of both non-human “nature”²⁹ and a major part of humanity in the name of universalised³⁰ models of progress and development³¹. Moreover, “scientific” knowledge production, being driven by facts, largely ignores the actual matters of concern³², that is, the pragmatic and ultimately ethical dimension of its own cosmology and practices of worldmaking.

All this points to the need for a transition towards a “scientific” practice and ethos³³ that facilitates envisioning worlds teeming with life, rather than following the beaten track, searching for “sustainable futures”³⁴ in between apocalyptic dystopias and triumphalist techno-phantasies.

Certain subalternised (often referred to as “indigenous”, “traditional” or “non-modern”) knowledge practices, on the other hand, explicitly refer to projections of good living (*buen vivir*) that centre around ethical relations of care and responsibility - not only among humans, but for life in general³⁵. Many (self-denominated) “indigenous”³⁶ nations therefore claim that their cosmo-practices are more

²⁷ As it is conceived particularly in Latin America – e.g. Martínez and Acosta 2017; Lander 2019; Escobar 2014; Leff and et al. 2002; Soto 2019.

²⁸ According to Santos (2007), this particular kind of dualism leads into an “abyssal” thinking that divides the world into two universes: a hegemonic, visible, naturalized realm and an othered, invisible, negated, subalternised realm – the latter existing not as an ethical subject, but only as a resource for exploitation for the benefit of the former.

²⁹ Merchant 2006; 2018.

³⁰ Harding 2015; Stengers 2018; Santos 2016; 2018.

³¹ Heidegger 1954; Horkheimer and Adorno 1969; Merchant 1983; Galeano 2010; Harding 2015; Stengers 2015.

³² Latour 2004; Stengers 2018.

³³ Here, we understand “scientific ethos” as a distinctive ethically motivated and socially sanctioned norm that guides scientific practice (Merton 1942), while “practice” is understood as a sympoietic world-making activity.

³⁴ Both “sustainability” and “future” are particular “Western” and thus modern/colonial notions that are being universalised as “neutral”, “objective” categories. “Sustainability” was coined in European economics on the basis of a naturalised ontological difference between man and nature, while common notions of “future” follow ontological notions of linear time, which are also fundamental to modern/colonial conceptions of progress and development.

³⁵ E.g. CRIC 2021; Soto 2019; Macas and et al. 2017; Chemhuru 2019; Huambachano 2024; Etieyibo 2017; Gumo et al. 2012; Kelbessa 2010; Ojomo 2011; Lincoleo 2024.

³⁶ Due to its intrinsic and instrumental relation to colonial dominance, we put terms like ‘indigenous’, ‘West(ern)’ and ‘modern’ in quotes here. For more detailed discussions on how notions of indigeneity have been construed as ontological Otherness in contrast to ‘Europe’, the ‘West’ or ‘modern’ societies in contrast to a ‘premodern’ ‘Rest’

socio-ecologically sustainable, with ample evidence of (on average) higher indicators of ecological health (e.g. biodiversity, forest cover, water quality) in the lands under their governance sustaining their claims³⁷.

However, it has long been recognised that there are no ready-made solutions that we “moderns” can simply adopt from other, “non-modern” cultures. Instead of essentialising otherness and proposing yet another universal model for solving all our global problems, “indigenous” movements (following the Zapatistas in Mexico) have been calling for building a “world where many worlds fit”³⁸, a “pluriverse”³⁹ based on equitable, intercultural dialogues.

Hence, to unleash the full potential of human problem-solving capacities demands engaging in an equitable, pluriversal dialogue⁴⁰ with diverging, hitherto excluded cosmovisions and practices, and critically assessing their problem-solving potential. This requires moving beyond the limitations of universalistic conceptions of “science” and essentialising notions of identity and alterity.

Research Strategy

The pluriversal dialogues in Bonn were part of a long-term transition strategy towards more holistic, pluriversal conceptions of “science” and academic practices capable of addressing the new quality of socio-ecological challenges posed by the current global polycrisis, by unleashing the full potential of hitherto neglected perspectives and knowledge practices.

Within this long-term strategy, a key task is to promote the establishment of pluriversal dialogues as part of scientific practice, thus contributing to the decolonisation of the current scientific system. The

see also Chakrabarty 2007; Dussel 2013; Ingold 2000; Latour 1993; Linhart 2025; Mignolo 2000; Tanasescu 2022, among others.

³⁷ As stated, e.g., as early as 1988 in the Belem Declaration on Biocultural Diversity:

<https://www.ethnobiology.net/what-we-do/core-programs/global-coalition-2/declaration-of-belem/> .

³⁸ EZLN 1996.

³⁹ Kothari et al. 2019.

⁴⁰ It should be emphasised that pluriversal dialogues must not be (mis)understood as yet another attempt by the modern/colonial “West” to extract knowledge from or project our fears and desires onto an essentialised “Rest” in order to solve Our (modern/colonial “Western” – now externalised to the whole planet) self-made problems. On the contrary, we understand pluriversal dialogues as spaces for experiencing and negotiating different and diverging cosmopractices (while trying to avoid slipping into juxtaposing flat essentialisations of the “modern”/“Western” against “non-modern”/“non-Western”) from the perspectives of different positionalities, while making underlying power relations between these positionalities explicit and thus productive for joint, multi-perspectival reflections on the cosmological, ethical and practical implications of enacting particular cosmopractices.

hypothesis to be tested in the long run is that a decolonial, pluriversal science based on epistemic equality should perform better in developing sustainable solutions to pressing socio-ecological challenges.

Long-term goals:

- To establish pluriversal dialogues as “good scientific practice” and a transition method towards a pluriverse of scientific practices,
- Contribute to a decolonised, pluriversal scientific ethos,
- Overcome the current geopolitics of epistemic violence⁴¹ entailed in universalist notions of “development” and “science” that are still excluding a majority of the world’s population from participating in the shaping of their futures.

Medium-term goals:

- To establish the Center for Life Ethics at the TRA 4 and its partner institutions (GHL/TRA 5, IAK/TRA 6, ZEF) at the University of Bonn as pioneering pluriversal spaces in academia,
- Raising awareness of the ontological and ethical dimensions of doing “science” in particular ways,
- To realize further pluriversal dialogues and to create pluriversal spaces in other places and world regions,
- Connecting these pluriversal spaces in a global network, joining and contributing to the self-empowerment of regional groups and networks,
- Building and linking international partnerships in Latin America, Africa, Europe and elsewhere.

Short-term goals:

- To bring together research collectives from “South” and “North”,
- Promote transdisciplinary research on the challenges and opportunities of pluriversal dialogues as a method for assessing diverging perspectives, cosmologies and practices,
- Develop innovative, solution-oriented methods and communication techniques for research and education that enable the integration of multiple perspectives on complex socio-ecological challenges,
- Provide sustainable results for a joint funding application for further larger scale activities in a growing glocal network of pluriversal spaces.

⁴¹ Spivak 1993 (1988).

Preparatory Co-Creative Processes

The event in Bonn was part of a dynamic process and a confluence of different, mostly independent activities of the organising consortium, which consisted in a number of different research institutes at the University of Bonn. While some participants had worked together in participatory research projects on ecological education or gender studies headed by the Center for Development Research (ZEF), others have records working with the Institute for Archaeology and Cultural Anthropology (IAK) or the Interdisciplinary Center for Latin America (ILZ). The Center for Life Ethics and the Global Heritage Lab have also previously collaborated on decolonial approaches to pluriversality.

In addition, research specifically aiming to prepare the event in Bonn had been developed by a collective of academics from intercultural education⁴². Following an invitation of the Center for Life Ethics⁴³, this research collective was initiated in late 2022 with the aim of developing and promoting pluriversal dialogues as a transition method for decolonising Science. The preparatory work of this collective included regular online meetings and workshops and an in person encounter in the Cauca region of Colombia in February 2024. During this encounter, the group visited educational initiatives of local communities in Tierradentro⁴⁴ and co-organised a week-long workshop series hosted by the Autonomous Intercultural Indigenous University of the Cauca's Regional Indigenous Council (UAIIN/CRIC) in Popayan.

⁴² Dr. Luis Fernando Sarango Macas (Kichwa Saraguro) is a founder and former rector of the University of the Indigenous People Amawtay Wasi, current rector of the Pluriversity Amawtay Wasi (Ecuador) and alternate judge of the Ecuadorian constitutional court. Dr. José Quidel Lincoleo and Gabriel Llanquinao (Mapuche) are linguists, renowned Mapuche intellectuals, authors of several books and papers on Mapuche cosmology and professors of intercultural education at the Catholic University of Temuco (Chile). Dr. José Quidel Lincóleo is also *longko* (traditional authority or "elder" of a local Mapuche community). Marcia Mandepora Chundary (Guaraní) was the first rector of the UniBOL Guaraní Apiaguaiki Tüpa (Bolivia), executive director of the Foundation for Education in Contexts of Multilingualism and Pluriculturalism (FUNPROEIB Andes) and is an honorary member of the Network of Indigenous Intercultural and Community Universities of Abya Yala (RUIICAY). Abelardo Ramos (Nasa) is a linguist and expert in contextual translation, and a longstanding member of the Regional Indigenous Council of the Cauca (CRIC), Colombia, since the 1970s, who has been involved in the construction of the Project for Bilingual Education (PEBI) and the Autonomous Intercultural indigenous University (UAIIN).

⁴³ This initiative was part of the research project Towards Pluriversal Dialogues coordinated by a senior research associate at the Center for Life Ethics, Jan Linhart (German), who has been working on intercultural indigenous education and the geopolitics of scientific universalism since the 2000s, spending about a decade in Abya Yala.

⁴⁴ For example, the Uma Kiwe initiative (San Andres de Piscimbalá) is quite a radical out-of-school education experience, while the community of Ûus Dxi'j (territory of Yaquivá) is in the process of self-organising their own school education. The two communities invited us to build alliances for the co-construction of alternative educational approaches that valorise and enact their ancestral heritage.

The event, entitled *Decolonialising the 'Sciences': A minga⁴⁵ on pluriversal knowledge practices* provided space for an extensive exchange of experiences between the collective and academics from the UAIIN/CRIC. It resulted in a preliminary agenda for further collaboration and the preparation of our Pluriversal Dialogues in Bonn in May 2024, including a selection of experiences and practices with a particular fertilising potential.

These experiences contributed to the collective organisation of our Bonn event, which was based on regular meetings and planning workshops between the organising team and the invited participants. Both the design and the programme of the event were a result of these collaborative processes.

Pluriversal Dialogues in Bonn

We began our gathering with a ritual ceremony in the ruins of the former cathedral of the Heisterbach Monastery on the hillside along the Rhine river. The ritual was led by participants from Abya Yala, Claudia Palechor (Yanacona, Colombia) and Francisca Elías Canás (Kaqchikel, Guatemala) and aimed to connect us (and especially our hearts) to the place, the ancestors and to each other. In the afternoon we went to a place of power -a stone circle of dubious origin on top of a hill overlooking the Rhine valley- to take part in a *Güxamkan* (dialogical Mapuche practice for collective in-depth analysis) on Mapuche conceptions of personhood, nature and environment. Thrilled by Dr. Gabriel Llanquinao's (Mapuche, Chile) exposition of deep and complex Mapuche conceptions and dialogical practices of knowing and decision-making, we engaged in wild reflections on our own place in and relationship with nature and different ways of negotiating these relations.

⁴⁵ Kichwa/Quechua practices of mutual aid and collective work to join forces for larger endeavours, such as building a house, preparing or harvesting a field.



Photographs showing inaugural ritual at the Heisterberg monastery.



Photograph of the Güxamkan.

Over the following days we engaged in embodied forms of *sentipensar* (feeling-knowing) such as forum theatre, systemic constellation, theatrical storytelling, playful detection and co-design methods, methods for intercultural knowledge co-creation and other performative and dialogical practices. Workshop sessions were followed by short presentations by participants on research topics and ongoing projects, including decolonial gender studies, different notions of life, ethics, nature, “spirituality” and

more-than-human relations from *Abya Yala*⁴⁶ and West Africa, the pluriverse as a conceptual tool for transformative action in science and the arts, ocean governance, the commons and commoning, the United Nations University's WISE Initiative for the valorisation of "indigenous" knowledge for more just and sustainable futures, on intercultural "indigenous" schools and universities (Amawtay Wasi, Ecuador; UAIIN, Colombia) and their educational and research frameworks, scientific conceptions of non-causal phenomena and quantum physics – just to give a kaleidoscopic overview.

The programme was intense, on some days lasting from 9 am in the morning until 9 pm in the evening, with vibrant active participation during all activities.

While our walks through the hillsides and ritual activities on the first day had connected us to the landscape and its history, subsequent workshops with exercises in Forum Theatre (facilitated by Fritz Letsch), Systemic Constellation and World Work (facilitated by Ruth Sander), and Playful Detection (facilitated by Dr. Pablo de la Cruz) employed our bodies to move and feel them in the space, providing glimpses of what it is like to be and relate otherwise – including as non-human entities such as ancestors or trees. These embodied experiences were complemented by dialogical reflections on conflicting ontologies and positionalities (e.g. "indigenous" communities, farmers, investors, public officials, etc.) during co-design processes (facilitated by Dr. Guillermo Pacheco).

In addition, presentations and workshops on different ontologies and ways of knowing and being set the stage for deep reflections on our most fundamental metaphysical suppositions and their epistemological and ethical implications. Accounts of African conceptions of life, nature, personhood and ethics would immediately catch the attention of the Amerindian participants, who saw strong similarities with their own ontologies. Claudia Palechor (Yanacona from Colombia), Dr. Luis Fernando Sarango (Kichua from Ecuador), Abelardo Ramos (Nasa from Colombia) and Francisca Elías Canás (Kaqchikel from Guatemala) contributed insightful accounts of Amerindian ontologies and experiences in constructing intercultural education as a way of reviving or re-existing⁴⁷ ancestral, community-led, earth-bound ways of knowing and being. The depth and complexity of Amerindian conceptions of life, human and more-than-nature, earth/territory/landscape and good living were powerful examples of knowing and being otherwise, and most importantly, in potentially less self-destructive ways. We also learned that

⁴⁶ Abya Yala, meaning "mature land" in Kuna language, is how many American native nations call their continent.

⁴⁷ Cadena and Escobar 2024; Walsh 2023; Walsh 2013; Mignolo and Walsh 2018.

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“indigenous” movements have been advancing in intercultural education, developing alternative practices of knowing such as the Breeding and Sowing of Wisdom and Knowledge (*Crianza y Siembra de Sabidurías y Conocimientos*, CRISSAC⁴⁸ – presented by Claudia Palechor) and Contextual Translation (presented by Abelardo Ramos), which can be seen as cutting edge approaches towards pluriversal ways of co-creating knowledge and wisdom for “living in the ruins”⁴⁹ or even after consecutive ends of their worlds⁵⁰.



Photographs showing Dr. Yilson Beltrán-Barrera during his performance.

One of the evening's most memorable activities was Dr Yilson Beltrán-Barrera's performative narration of his peace play '*Un Sueño*' (A Dream). Beltrán's performance drew the audience into the

⁴⁸ CRISSAC has been developing at the UAIIN/CRIC (2021) as a decolonial substitute for “Western” conceptions of “scientific research”. CRISSAC is defined as a “process of feeling-living” (*proceso sentivivencial*) with and for Nature, the community (including more-than-human and invisible beings) and life in the broadest sense.

⁴⁹ Haraway 2016; Tsing 2015.

⁵⁰ Danowski and Castro 2017; Kopenawa 2021.

surreal adventures of a fantastic protagonist who metaphorically resembles the colonised Other, dramatising the violent process of being ripped out of one's own world and forcibly assuming a schizophrenic double consciousness. The embodied feelings and impressions that this dreamlike artistic performance evoked in the audience can hardly be described in words and certainly go far beyond rational attempts to comprehend the colonial experience.

The event was concluded on Friday afternoon with a co-design workshop for envisioning joint follow-up projects among the participants and a closing ritual of gratitude in the CLE's riverside courtyard.



Photographs showing closing ritual.

Results and Outlook

For many participants, experiencing embodied practices as a means of co-creating knowledge in an academic context was an overwhelming experience. Bringing together emotional and physical sensations, spiritual experiences and a variety of perspectives and ideas about our place in and relationships with human and more-than-human nature captured our imagination and allowed us to reflect deeply on and eventually unlearn old 'truths' that have guided our ways of perceiving, conceiving and feeling. Among the many topics we discussed, some received particular attention.

1. Perhaps the most central concern has been how different notions of (what in dominant English-speaking discourse is being termed) 'environment', 'life', 'nature', 'human' or 'culture' shape the ways in which we perceive, understand and relate to

different worlds. The resulting possibilities are directly related to our understanding of what can and should be imagined as 'good life', which in turn determines what we perceive as urgent challenges and potential solutions. In other words, our (implicit or explicit) ontological conceptions of what the world is made of and how its constituent parts relate to each other inform our ethical and aesthetic conceptions of what is deemed either desirable or abhorrent, and thus what kind of “futures” (another dominant term for potential unfoldings) we imagine as possible and/or desirable. In this context, “indigenous” ethical conceptions of a “good living” (*buen vivir/vivir bien*) and their focus on the intrinsic value of life and cosmic harmony with all being were of particular interest and seemed to fit well together with the Life Ethics approach which is currently being developed at the Center for Life Ethics⁵¹. Such a common, non-anthropocentric, life-centred and ontologically open ethical framework could provide the basis for cosmo- or onto-political⁵² negotiations about desirable futures.

2. However, the very notion of “future(s)” may be problematic, as colonial notions of linear time and teleological progress hide behind its seemingly liberating potential. Other conceptions of time/space, such as the Andean *pacha*, suggest a more circular notion of time and space, an endless circle of worlds coming to an end to make way for new worlds, where we follow in the footsteps of our ancestors, who are thus walking ahead of us, paving the way to the 'future' rather than being part of a backward, closed and completed 'past'⁵³.

⁵¹ The innovative concept of Life Ethics is a tentative approach of an ethical framework for orienting ethical analyses and discourses including cosmopolitical negotiations during pluriversal dialogues. According to Life Ethics (as understood by Christiane Woopen and the Center for Life Ethics at the University of Bonn) an action is ethically good if it respects or contributes to the flourishing, the beauty and the plenitude of all life. It is congenial to the guiding principles of CRISSAC in that it focuses on all elements of an action and on the flourishing, beauty and abundance of all life as a common frame of reference for specification and discourse without claiming to define in detail what this must mean for all individuals and groups. It is thus open to different understandings of “beauty”, “flourishing”, “abundance” or “life” and to different cosmovisions and cosmopractices as long as they don’t violate the principle itself.

⁵² Stengers 2005; 2018b; Blaser 2016; 2013.

⁵³ Parra and Llanquiao 2017; Macas 2014; Macas and et al. 2017; Soto 2019; Lincoleo 2024.

3. Our colleagues from Abya Yala never tired of emphasising that for them knowing is an embodied practice involving activities such as speaking, thinking, feeling, seeing, smelling, eating, drinking and tasting, making music, dancing, weaving, planting or hunting. Our own embodied experiences during the event seemed to support their claims, telling us that embodied, synaesthetic, narrative and performative ways of knowing can contribute significantly to changing our understanding of and relating to different worlds. But what could or should be the role and potential contribution of narrative and embodied ways of knowing in the production of “scientific” knowledge, and particularly, for envisioning and finding solutions to our current global challenges?
4. Moreover, in many (if not most) so-called “non-scientific” knowledge cultures the establishment and careful maintenance of relationships with more-than-human entities (e.g. ancestors and other “earth-beings”⁵⁴ or “chthonic ones”⁵⁵) plays a crucial role. But what role (if any) could or should such “non-causal” phenomena and “spiritual” practices of relating to these phenomena play as legitimate means for acquiring valuable and/or reliable “scientific” knowledge? Can insights from e.g. quantum physics provide a “scientific” explanation for these phenomena, and thus, bridge the onto-epistemological gap between “science” and other knowledge cultures? – Or do we rather have to come to terms with unbridgeable ontological divergences and learn how to negotiate them?
5. Participants from Abya Yala also highlighted the problematic use of the term “science” as a hegemonic, universalising concept of a particular set of (modern/colonial) knowledge practices and as a universal reference point for any discussion of valid and legitimate knowledge claims. Breaking with the conventional routines, paradigms, practices and hierarchies of “scientific” knowledge production and dissemination has been defined as a key challenge on the way to a decolonial

⁵⁴ Cadena 2015.

⁵⁵ Haraway 2016; Haraway 2015.

geopolitics of knowledge based on onto-epistemic equity. But what could replace "science" as a name for legitimate, reliable knowledge practices? While "decoloniality" was discussed as a liberating and uniting counter discourse to hegemonic universalisms, some participants also pointed to the risks of slipping into universalising a radical anti-universalism and of stigmatising and dividing (otherwise like-minded) people into colonized victims and notoriously colonial, hetero-patriarchal, white, male (you name it!) wrong-doers,

6. Finally, we came to the big question of what a "decolonised" "science" (or whatever this new paradigm of knowledge should be called?!) might actually look like.

Time was short and the pace of our intense programme too intense to delve deeply into all these complex issues, but opening up and connecting these different scopes was an inspiring experience that many participants said they would like to continue.

During our closing workshops on the last day of our gathering in Bonn (Friday 24 May 2024), participants were invited to reflect on their experiences and think about possible follow-up projects.

Our retrospective reflections showed that, on the whole, our event was a success, at least in the sense that the participants found it a highly enriching and inspiring experience, which inspired them to continue working together in the field. In particular, participants were amazed at the possibility of using even radically divergent cosmopractices in an academic space and how these experiences had proved productive for themselves in terms of a deeper understanding of other positions and the value of different perspectives and knowledge practices. It was also often praised that these collective, embodied and spiritual experiences created a shared sense of joyful camaraderie among participants, motivating further collaboration.

The projections of possible future cooperation revolved around a number of common goals and concerns, such as:

- The organisation of further events, pluriversal dialogues or summer schools in academic and community contexts,

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- Development of educational approaches and exchange programmes with a transdisciplinary, intercultural, pluriversal focus, based on onto-epistemic equity and promoting narrative and embodied practices,
- To explore marginalised (e.g. “indigenous”) and Life Ethics approaches as a common, life-centred basis for cosmopolitical negotiations in a pluriverse of different worlds,
- Collective publishing, including a collection and papers in scientific journals,
- Further development of pluriversal dialogues as a methodological approach,
- Experimenting with and further developing “indigenous” educational and research paradigms such as CRISSAC in different academic and community contexts,
- Promote, strengthen and connect glocal meshworks of transition initiatives in research and education and create new pluriversal spaces,
- Raising funds for collaborative projects.

After the event, we held another planning workshop with the participants and invited them to contribute individual or collective chapters to the production of a collection. Our collaborative book project currently counts 27 authors who will contribute a total of 17 chapters. The book will be published in English, Spanish and local languages under an open access licence.

Some of the participants are also continuing to work on further follow-up projects and are jointly writing funding applications on the basis of regular meetings. If successful, these activities could lead to a coordinated federation of transdisciplinary projects operating in different areas and world regions, but with the common aim to trigger a transition towards a pluriversal geopolitics of knowledge based on onto-epistemic equity.

Discussion: Challenges and Opportunities

Onto-epistemic equity is a gigantic, perhaps even an impossible task. Even though many of us have been working on the issue for decades, we are only just taking our first small steps to join forces and weave a common strategy to decolonise the way we understand “science”, “research” and “education”. The list of serious challenges to our task is almost endless, but just to begin with, one could easily speculate that questioning the grand narratives of science, humanism and the Enlightenment will be met with fierce

resistance both inside and outside the scientific community – and often with good reason. However, we will have to move beyond the over-simplified oppositions between realists and constructionists that fuelled the science wars of the 1990s. Talking about the pluriverse means going far beyond constructionism and its representational, essence-dualist, onto-epistemological premises. Other worlds may not entail such premises at all and therefore suggest very different foundations of understanding and, most importantly, other matters of concern. Achieving onto-epistemic equity would probably require us to accept the possibility of a pluriverse of equally real worlds, each made up by different things and following different principles. Negotiating one's own stakes without violating the other's right to be taken seriously requires learning to deal with radical uncertainties while still maintaining a clear idea of shared fundamental ethical principles. Instead of debating (particular) matters of fact (as it would be the traditional business of modern science), at issue is now how to negotiate different matters of concern without slipping into either relativism or universalising particularisms. Since we cannot (and must not!) judge which world is more “real”, we need to understand which concerns move and unfold these different worlds, and ultimately which kinds of life these unfoldings might allow to be lived and which not. The question of which kinds of life are worth living and which are not is, of course, a deeply ethical question. This is why ethics comes in as a fundamental issue, even before epistemological concerns about “truth”. What really matters is not how “real” certain facts are, but what matters is the (im)possibility of living certain lives. Pluriversal dialogues, as we understand them, could serve as a platform for negotiating diverging and conflicting matters of concern as they emerge from different worlds. The particular historical moment we are living in urgently requires us to develop tools for peaceful and productive cosmopolitical negotiation in order to prevent global disaster – be it as a result of global ecological collapse, new totalitarian regimes or wars. We hope that by creating spaces for pluriversal dialogues within and beyond academia we will contribute to a better mutual understanding, and consequently to more respect and cooperation between diverging worlds. But this will depend crucially on our ability to agree on a common ethical framework. After World War II, the Declaration of Human Rights did a great deal in this regard. However, our current challenges require a new non-Eurocentric, post-anthropocentric, ontologically open ethical framework capable of mediating a pluriverse of worlds. Together with many “indigenous” and civil society movements, we suggest that taking life (including non-human life) as a core referent could be a good starting point for developing such a new ethical framework.

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