Democratising Research on Parliaments and People:

post-colonial critiques, difficult questions and reshaping practice

A discussion paper – please do not quote

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Abstract

In this paper we consider how colonial legacies influence the study of politics and Parliaments and how these can be negotiated in ways that allow for a wide range of voices to be included in research and debates. A broader examination of politics requires us to expand out to consider the relationships between Parliaments, politicians and people that arise from the specifics of their economic, historical, cultural and social settings and encounters. Drawing on examples from two projects – *Parliamentary Effectiveness* which examined the work of parliamentarians in Ethiopia and Bangladesh; and *Deepening Democracy* which focuses on politically fragile states (especially Ethiopia and Myanmar) – here we offer some provisional reflections on the conceptual, geographical, linguistic, institutional, organisational and structural hierarchies that have shaped these international coalitions and some practical means by which structures of power can be renegotiated, or at least questioned. This recognition creates important questions: How do we create, manage and maintain relationships between partners in different countries? And how do we do this while acknowledging the implicitly unequal structure of funding, monitoring and evaluation in which we ourselves are enmeshed? To turn critique into practical action remains an ongoing challenge particularly when constructing research coalitions that span cultures and continents.

1. Introduction

Since 2015 a global movement of vigorous activism has sought to challenge the political, intellectual and structural legacies of colonialism and racism within the academy. Beginning with the Rhodes Must Fall protests at Cape Town University, this campaign quickly spread to other countries and other institutions including our own[1]. The celebration of SOAS's centenary in 2016 provided an opportunity to reflect on the colonial roots of the institution[2] and the various disciplines it teaches. Efforts to decolonise the curriculum have brought students and academics

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[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhodes_Must_Fall; https://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n07/amia-srinivasan/under-rhodes; https://rmfoxford.wordpress.com;   https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/feb/19/soas-philosopy-decolonise-our-minds-enlightenment-white-european-kenan-malik

[2] The authors are based in the Anthropology Department at SOAS University of London. The School of Oriental Studies was established to train colonial administrators in the languages and cultures of the East (Lord Curzon recommended that institution as an aid to the British Imperial Mission and part of a "necessary furniture of Empire.". Anthropology as a discipline also has murky origins as part of the knowledge creation mechanisms of European Imperialism.

together to critically examine the ways in which unconscious assumptions and privileged positions continue to shape pedagogy and research at the University.

In this paper we consider how colonial legacies influence the study of politics and Parliaments and how these can be negotiated in ways that allow for a wide range of voices to be included. Writing this paper we have drawn examples from two projects:

- o *Parliamentary Effectiveness* (2014-17) was managed by Emma Crewe based at SOAS and Ruth Fox at the Hansard Society with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Department for International Development (DFID). This was a three-and-a-half-year programme examined the work of parliamentarians when engaging with the public in Ethiopia and Bangladesh.

- o The *Deepening Democracy Programme* (2017-2020) is run by the Global Research Network on Parliaments and People,[3] based at SOAS and led by Emma Crewe with Richard Axelby as programme manager (funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Global Challenges Research Fund). Again, Ethiopia is one of two countries in which research will be conducted but this time alongside Myanmar.

Here we offer some provisional reflections on the conceptual, geographical, linguistic, institutional, organisational and structural hierarchies that have shaped these international coalitions and some practical means by which structures of power can be renegotiated, or at least questioned. This is intended as a reflective and self-critical examination of how we hope to overcome institutional and ideological obstacles and engage with global partners in ways that move towards decolonising research. This paper is not intended as a definitive answer nor a set of prescriptions capable of reversing multiple structural imbalances. Rather it is a means to raise questions, suggestions and ideas which we, together with colleagues and partners, can begin to think through, individually and collectively.

2. Nationalism, post-colonialism and the culture of politics

Seeing the political through a post-colonial lens: Carved into the stone over the arched entrance to New Delhi's Secretariat[4] building is a formidable reminder: "Liberty will not descend to a people. A people must raise themselves to liberty. It is a blessing that must be earned before it can be enjoyed." Notions of liberty – in the sense of peoples' self-rule – are, paradoxically, central to Imperial projects; empire relies upon a division between those that are judged incapable of governing themselves and those whose civilization and knowledge justifies them ruling over others. In *Orientalism* (1978) Edward Said combined ideas of cultural hegemony with a Foucaultian theorisation of discourse to highlight how notions of western superiority were constructed and communicated in support of Imperialism. Said pointed to the ways in which western scholars and artists produced essentialized visions of the societies of Asia, the Middle East and North Africa as static and undeveloped and, in doing so, fabricating a view of Oriental culture that can be studied, depicted, and reproduced. Implicit in this fabrication of the East as 'other', are notions of Western societies as developed, rational, flexible, and superior. Similarly, Mudimbe has written about the

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[3] For details see: parliaments4people.com.

[4] Despite (or perhaps because of) highly problematic views about the people of Asia and Africa, the architect Edwin Lutyens was commissioned to design centres of government (including parliament buildings) in colonial South Africa and India under the British Raj.

equivalent process of European colonisers (and early anthropologists) inventing images of savage Africa, as indicated by their attitude towards African objects as symbols of art as 'primitive, simple, childish and nonsensical' (1988: 10).

Given that the Raj ended a mere 17 years after the inauguration of New Delhi as capital of Imperial India, the epigraph carved over the arch of the secretariat might be seen as something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Over the half century from 1947 the European colonial project was rolled back with the achievement of independence for the nations of Asia and Africa. But, while not exactly written in stone, institutional structures and modes of thought characteristic of colonialism have proved harder to shift. These ideological and institutional forms continue to shape formal and informal relationships in our postcolonial world. The language, policies and practices of international development often derives from linear understandings of modernity and abstract notions of 'good governance'. From Suez to Iraq, the categorisation of 'rogue', 'failed' and 'politically fragile' states have worked to shape foreign policy without consideration of the unequal geo-political relationships that set the context for social and political breakdown. Similarly within International Development it is possible to identify a series of disciplinary framings and assumptions that centralise and normalise particular constructions of parliamentary politics and liberal democracy as basic reference points while excluding and erasing alternative perspectives. Particular spatial ontologies – 'international', 'global', 'national', 'local' – reinforce a distinct disciplinary order that, we would argue, limits the potential and possibilities for the study of Parliaments and politics.

In the remainder of this section we consider how these dominant framings could be reformulated to reveal new insights and perspectives. Here we highlight two radically different ways of examining the political – first the post-colonial subaltern perspective championed by Indian historian Partha Chatterjee; and second the call from British anthropologist Jonathan Spencer for the cultural specificities of politics to be given the attention they deserve. Both, in different ways, reject the notion of modular diffusion in which the idea and institutions of the 'modern' democratic nation-state originating in Europe before spreading out across the non-Western world as people 'raise themselves to liberty'. This leads us to consider a third perspective for studying the internationalisation of political discourse in which global ideas – of democracy, development, security and modernity – are redeployed to promote particular national interests.

Alternative ways of seeing: the politics of exclusion. During the 20th century, anti-colonial movements throughout the colonized world struggled against European domination. Though ultimately successful, according to Partha Chatterjee, the triumphs of these struggles derived not a from a rejection of the "Western" political model of the nation-state, but on its acceptance. 'Nationalism sets out to assert its freedom from European domination. But in the very conception of its project, it remains a prisoner of the prevalent European intellectual fashions' (Chatterjee 1986: 10). In other words, out of struggles for independence there emerged new dominant interests which are based on particular understandings of the nation state and of civil and political society and which, in certain respects, mirror the hierarchical impositions of colonial rule. This is identified by Chatterjee as the post-colonial politics of the elite. To Chatterjee freedom struggles remain incomplete so long as hegemonic forms of politics continue to actively work to subordinate by gender, ethnicity or religion. With the nation conceived as a 'deep, horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 1991: 6-7), nationalism encourages us to disregard these exclusions. The result, according to Chatterjee, is that 'autonomous forms of imagination of the community were, and continue to be, overwhelmed and swamped by the history of the post-colonial state' (Chatterjee 1993: 11).

'History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the post-colonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonised' (Chatterjee 1993: 5).

To counter such tendencies, and to recognise alternative conceptualisations of democracy, Chatterjee encourages us to pay attention to 'histories from below' and interrelate these to the narratives of nationalism and decolonisation. For example, ethnographic and historical studies reveal that democracy in a shallow sense – electing representatives through the ritual of voting – is no guarantee that citizens' rights will be fulfilled or poverty reduced. Democratically elected governments may use their mandates to legitimate the use of violence against those expressing demands for inclusion. Here absences and exclusions – be they gendered, or by class, ethnicity or religion – are as important as the presence and experience of those who compete in elections or who occupy Parliaments. At the national and local levels it is vital for political studies to attend to the micro-politics of inclusion and exclusion by which some voices are magnified through the silencing of others. Doing so requires us to seek out hidden transcriptions and alternative histories of the 'subaltern' whose voice is excluded from the legislature. By thinking 'outside the parliamentary box' we can begin to open up to the perceptions and practices of those who are commonly side-lined on the basis of gender, ethnicity, class and caste. In the deployment of what Scott (2008) called 'the weapons of the weak' we can begin to recognise challenges to the legitimacy of ideas of 'the nation' and established systems of politics which support them.

Alternative ways of seeing: cultures of politics. Though important in identifying neglected arenas for the study of politics, the above approach arguably accepts and thereby reinforces the binary divides – between East and West, tradition and modernity – identified in Said's Orientalism. It follows, as Jonathan Spencer points out, that followers of the subaltern school are rather too enthusiastic in accepting representations of the colonial state at face value: 'Chatterjee presents the state as external, an avatar of European rationality at its most coercive, and insists on the possibility of analytically separating the derivative from the non-derivative in his examples of nationalist thought' (Spencer 2007: 67). This particular framing, continued into the post-colonial world, would seem to imply that colonial science and colonial administration might be reinterpreted, appropriated and reimagined in new cultural settings. While we need to move beyond unidirectional notions of progress and recognise alternative formulations of politics, we shouldn't ignore the possibilities for adaptation, acclimatisation, negotiation and pluralism that exist within the institutions of parliamentary politics. Rejecting Chatterjee's division of western and non-western modes of politics, Spencer calls for attention to be paid to how the political has come to be constituted in different parts of the post-colonial world. These forms, Spencer argues, may be unimaginable without the institutional framework of the preceding colonial state, but their structures and practices are not and should not be limited to the known history of that institutional framework alone. He writes:

'Political modernity is a diverse modernity, because different people bring different histories, values, and expectations to their encounters with its apparently invariant forms. But the political itself is not a static object mutely awaiting its local interpretation, it is a field of tremendous potential productivity and danger, never less than disturbing, and often seemingly capable of blowing away received expectations in very different areas of life' (Spencer 2007: 48).

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The notion that there might be plural interpretations of modernity concealed behind the familiar façade of the nation-state opens up new and exciting areas for research into Parliaments and parliamentarians in all their variety. Returning to the Lutyen's parliament building at the heart of New Delhi it becomes clear the 'liberty' that the people of India attained in 1947 is not limited to the practice and performance of politics in this one institution. Anyone familiar with the *tamasha,* of South Asian political life, the vernacularization of identify politics in India's Hindi-speaking 'cow-belt' (Michelutti 2008), the deification of political leaders in Bangladesh (Ahmed, forthcoming) and the complex calculations and emotions behind voting decisions (Bannerjee 2014), will know that the rites and rituals of politics are not confined to the narrow prescriptions of a westernised 'elite' notion of politics. This allows us to return to the inside of parliamentary buildings and to follow politicians as they go about their work, to consider how structures shape politics but to also recognise that new and indigenous forms of doing politics and cultures of representation that grow upon and emerge out of them.

Alternative ways of seeing: global discourse and national interest. The agency and activity of politics plays out at all levels and creates new forms of exclusion and inclusion. Examples from Africa show how governments have proved adept at the deployment of key discourses to promote their interests (Ferguson 1990). Gallagher points out that when Mengara writes 'the Africa we know and hear about today is, essentially, a European-made Africa', he may be overplaying Western agency in the portrayal of Africa (2015: 5, 11). African governments have had a significant role to play in the process of image management. Fisher has written about how successfully Ugandan and Rwandan governments, personalised in the shape of Museveni and Kagame – both seen as honest and straightforward leaders by donors – have managed to conjure positive images of their countries with the help of PR firms to ensure generous flows of aid. In contrast, Kenya has struggled to win the same level of favour, in part because elections are won in Kenya by attacking Western donors and their policies (Fisher 2015: 71, 79). Fanta writes about 'the long history of Ethiopia negotiating with the rest of the world to project a specific image of itself' (2015: 87). Their skill has been in not merely mimicking discourses but subtly contesting them, pointing to their flaws – for example, maintaining an image of democracy but completely changing its substance so that 'it is not so much a democracy by the people but rather a democracy for the people… Ethiopia is able to portray itself as a democracy while at the same time criticising the Western understanding of what "being democratic" actually means' (ibid: 93). At the same time, the appropriation of the discourse of the fight against terrorism has made it difficult for Western donors to criticise the Ethiopian government, especially when new donors – such as the Chinese government – studiously avoid discussion of democracy.

Another means of moving beyond colonial modes of thought and study is to look at the ways that global discourses are deployed in the service of particular forms of national interest. Here we draw attention to the way that understandings of politics are generated and combine and interact with one another. Political discourses are not inert nor are they the property of a single time or place. As part of a process of mutual constitution national interests work to shape global discourses and in turn are redeployed by local actors – civil society organisations, rights activists, separatists movements and so on. Research on politics and parliaments can illuminate these processes and help us understand the complex and evolving systems of discursive power that shape all of our lives.

We finish this section with the provocation: are we now moving beyond the post-colonial (and into the post-post-colonial?)? Since the financial crash of 2008 the divide between former imperial powers and former colonies is no longer so obvious. We are now witnessing a paradigm shift in which the liberal democratic model which shaped the second half of the 20th century is replaced

by new systems of political though and modes of governance. The rise of China to global superpower status is one example of this. Another is found in the spark of counter-hegemonic resistance that may ignite first in Global South before spreading around the world as was the case with Rhodes Must Fall.

Our approach to the global study of Parliaments and people. If academic inquiry is to properly understand the historical and cultural specificities of politics it is necessary to look beyond the conventional narrow analysis of outputs (elections, laws) and behaviour (voting patterns, party obedience). Recognising the value of paying proper attention to alternative modes of politics, we need to reframe our thinking, question standard assumptions and see things from others' points of view. A broader examination of politics requires us to expand out to consider the relationships between Parliaments, politicians and people that arise out of the specifics of their economic, historical, cultural and social settings and encounters. Following Chatterjee this allows us to consider questions of exclusion and inclusion; and influenced by Spencer we also consider the plural forms taken by politics, how these contribute unique cultures of representations, which, at the same time, combine and interact with one another as political discourse, communicate at the global level. The comparative study of Parliaments asks how they differ and what cultural and historical context explain these differences. Doing so opens up the study of politics within former colonial powers alongside former colonies, recognising their uniqueness while paying due attention to the historical interconnectedness and continuities in the unequal distribution of power and influence.

It is these approaches that informed the work of the *Parliamentary Effectiveness* programme that examined the work of Parliaments and parliamentarians in Bangladesh and Ethiopia. This coalition of scholars from the UK, Bangladesh and Ethiopia focused in particular on studying the process, rather than the outcomes, of Parliament. To limit our study to achieve some comparability and rigour, we selected several case studies: the relationship between MPs and constituents in at least six constituencies in each country; one example in each place of public engagement during the making of one policy, on law and one budget; and interviewing and observing male and female politicians to find out how they experience politics differently, what influence they have and the obstacles they face. Our aim was to generate knowledge that could inform debates about politics in Bangladesh and Ethiopia, as examples:

- *Local politics*: The representation of constituencies by MPs in Bangladesh entailed regular visits, clientalistic relations and intensive involvement by MPs in local development. In contrast, Ethiopian MPs visited their constituencies only twice year on average with minimal involvement in the lives of constituents.
- *Performance*: Even though both countries have a one-party state presently, politics still requires MPs to perform politics. However, while the audience of constituents is important in Bangladesh (in the face of intra-party competition for seats), international policy-makers are a more important audience than citizens in Ethiopia.
- *Public engagement*: although there is better scope for public engagement in Ethiopia in law and budget making according to rules and theory, both civil society and the media are so constrained that they have little influence in practice.
- *National specificity*: the mechanism of temporary caretaker governments in Bangladesh was an idiosyncratic way of running elections that ensured neither of the main political parties could accuse the other of rigging the election. By abolishing it for the 2014 election, leading to a boycott of the election by the opposition, two party democracy broke down.

- *Politicians*: Bangladeshi MPs tend to be business people (predominantly male), whereas in Ethiopia they are former civil servants, teachers, academics, and veterans, with nearly 40% being female. Women are poorly represented among MPs in Bangladesh but hold high positions in government while the opposite is true in Ethiopia.

These findings have important implications for the study of Parliament and for supporting democratization beyond the countries in which the research was conducted. Importantly they illustrate why we should be wary of unthinkingly assuming that the 'Westminster model' provides a blueprint for democracy. For example, the caretaker model was unique to Bangladesh but was a solution that worked effectively for this context. Some generalisations about problems in fragile states facing the threat of conflict are possible but solutions have to be specific to the context.

To us, as part of a new international research coalition, decolonising knowledge is about deepening our understanding of the world, seeing different perspectives beyond a western-centric outlook and challenging global orthodoxies. To do so requires that we first must recognise the hierarchies that structure international research, and second seek to create and maintain relationships at a number of levels that negate or reverse (or at least question) these hierarchies. In the next section we give some examples of how we have tried to open up space for different voices in the two research projects looking at Parliaments in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Ethiopia.

3. Reversing academic hierarchies

Returning to the binaries of Said's Orientalism we see how European imperialism both depended upon collecting knowledge of the non-western world, and created notions of racial hierarchy that justified the holding and deployment of such knowledge. In the colonial setting the separation of observer and subject reinforced a racial divide, with attempts to achieve global comprehension of physical phenomena necessarily abstracting them away from their specific geographical locations. Reacting against such racialized methodologies, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith writes:

> 'It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations. It angers us when practices linked to the last century, and the centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of indigenous peoples' claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems for living within our environments' (1999: 1).

This recognition creates important questions. How do we create, manage and maintain relationships between partners in different countries? And how do we do this while acknowledging the implicitly unequal structure of funding, monitoring and evaluation in which we ourselves are enmeshed? To turn critique into practical action remains an ongoing challenge particularly when constructing research coalitions that span cultures and continents.

Here we outline a series of inequalities that have become apparent during the establishment and running of our research projects. It goes without saying that these hierarchies are reversed as a matter of basic fairness. And, who knows, by effecting such reversals, might not the inclusion of a

wider variety of voices and perspectives contribute to fuller and better understandings of the workings of politics?

Reversing hierarchies in access to resources. When looking at academic institutions around the world the material legacy of colonialism remains apparent. With a few notable exceptions, the academy in many African and Asian countries suffers from national under-investment (de Waal 2015), lack freedom of expression or intellectual property rights, and frequently lose promising young scholars to the institutions of Europe and North America. In many respects it is the financially wealthy 'elite' institutions of Europe and North America that continue to monopolise expertise and resources including access to libraries and as editorial gate-keepers for journals. Their claims to expertise are bolstered by the ability to determine access to funding and the setting of research agendas. In many North-South partnerships the role of Global South researchers is limited to mere data collection while the Global North scholars design, theorise and publish (Dodsworth and Cheeseman 2017: 139-140).

Until recently funding for international research awarded by grant-makers in the UK stipulated that the Principal Investigator, or researcher leading the project, had to be an UK academic. The US and other European countries tend to employ the same eligibility criteria. It is changing and there are now a few exceptions where scholars in the Global South are allowed as co-investigators and even as Principal Investigators.[5] From 2009 DFID's joint scheme with ESRC included the full participation of 'developing country researchers' as an explicit objective (van Gardingen et al 2011: 33). The ESRC-DFID Joint Scheme for Research on International Development saw an increase of Southern-based Co-Investigators in successful projects but no increase in Southern PIs, partly, according to evaluators, because they would prefer to focus on research rather than administration and management (INTRAC 2012). An evaluation of the ESRC-DFID Poverty Alleviation Research fund reported that 90% of their grants involved southern-based researchers and 41% of the grants named southern-based researchers as co-investigators (France et al 2016: 82). None of these evaluations seemed to disaggregate their data by age, race, gender, ethnicity or stage in their career. The relatively new Global Challenge Research Fund states: 'If the academics and research team can demonstrate experience or understanding of successful impacts within the specific context; relevant expertise might be located within both UK and overseas partners' but falls short of requiring the involvement of Global South scholars.[6]

So joint research between academics and development organisations in the North and South is increasing, but iniquitous practices risk prolonging the power imbalances characteristic of colonialism[7]. The inadequate research opportunities for scholars in the Global South means that their under-representation as research leaders in international projects persists. In fact, Dodsworth and Cheeseman draw our attention to a decline in the publication of articles written by people living in Africa rather than those visiting to research it (2017: 132). They cite Tilley as critiquing the practice of Western scholars using Africa as a living laboratory, once even to maintain colonial empires, and argue that these patterns persist (ibid: 137). Writing as UK white academics researching in other people's countries, at this point in global postcolonial geo-politics

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[5] For example, see the UK research councils and Defra's Darwin initative https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/the-darwin-initiative and the Royal Society and DFID: http://www.elrha.org/news/royal-society-dfid-africa-capacity-building-initiative/, accessed 22nd February 2018.

[6] http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/international/gcrfodaguidance-pdf/, accessed 22nd February 2018.

[7] The perils of perpetuating postcolonial biases in research: A proliferation of partnerships between academics and development practitioners pose ethical and practical concerns. 5 February 2018. Munyaradzi Makoni. https://www.natureindex.com/news-blog/the-perils-of-perpetuating-postcolonial-biases-in-research accessed 5th March 2018.

we are also arguing that the ethical route is to create openings for scholars in the Global South and African and Asian diaspora in the UK. On the ESRC-DFID funded project on Parliamentary Effectiveness we accomplished this to some extent by involving scholars in Bangladesh and Ethiopia as the main researchers. In this project we created opportunities for national researchers, including three senior scholars (all men) and seven more junior ones (four women, three men).[8] However, there were severe constraints to how much could be achieved in practice due to institutional biases, hierarchies of knowledge and barriers to access. So, for the benefit of those who find their way into international coalitions, it is worth asking, how might we produce a more egalitarian research environment? Or, more specifically given our interest in politics, how do you work democratically to study democracy in an international configuration?

Establishing equitable coalitions. Let's consider a fairly typical set of proposals for creating egalitarian partnerships. The Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE) has produced guidance on transboundary partnership based on trust, mutual learning and shared ownership (KFPE 2014). They suggest 11 principles:

1. set the agenda together to 'counter-balance the inherent inequalities' in partnerships;
2. interact with stakeholders to awaken their interest in results
3. assess expected benefits and assign roles and responsibilities so that they are shared
4. make sure accountability goes in all directions, including downwards, with feedback loops;
5. create a learning culture on success and failure taking into account different perceptions;
6. translate personal knowledge into sustainable institutional capacity development;
7. share data and dismantle geographic barriers;
8. disseminate widely beyond Northern libraries;
9. agree in advance how to divide up profits and merits and iron out disparities;
10. translate knowledge into context-specific application and sensitise policy-makers;
11. secure long-term outcomes by securing funding, strengthening the environment and preventing the brain drain.

This guidance is logical but glosses over the history of inequalities in partnerships, and the reasons they are endlessly reproduced, implying that a commitment to principles alone can assist in 'rebalancing'. Scholarship on strategizing within organisations reveals that people's practices are never driven by the promotion of values or rules alone (Mowles 2008). This is why idealised values or rules-based guidance which is abstracted from experience tend to fail when people rely too heavily on these 'recipes'. If they improve partnership, it is because other processes of exercising practical judgement (in Dewey's sense 1915) in response to specific realities are probably at play. Critical scholars question claims about the idea that equality can be achieved through principles. Bradley argues that despite good intentions North-South partnerships between scholars doesn't necessary mean that Southern researchers have a significant role in research agenda setting (2008). Dodsworth and Cheeseman point to inequalities in the production of knowledge about Africa in current partnerships and to the different ideas about bias, objectivity and ethics that have to be worked through (2017: 132). Our past experience of striving towards democracy in research coalitions requires a mix of research about doing research and political processes of negotiation. To be more specific, this mix relies on: (a) understanding the different constraints, incentives and enablers within unequal relationships and what scope there is for responding to them, (b) creating

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space for those who are habitually marginalised and negotiating ways forward, acknowledging that there will always be winners and losers.

The multi-disciplinary programme on *Parliamentary Effectiveness* involved a coalition of political scientists, public policy / administration scholars, and anthropologists exploring the relationship between Parliament, parliamentarians and individuals and groups within the public and ran from February 2017 to December 2020. We jointly planned the research in great detail in month two of the project at a meeting in Dhaka. As it progressed we found that when running a coalition, good relationships within the research team were essential for achieving quality research. An important aspect of developing and maintaining collegiate relationships, and overcoming tensions, was keeping up a continual channel of communication in part to discuss different approaches and assumptions directly and talking through what to do about challenges. So following the first five principles when setting up the project was not sufficient; you need a process of continual negotiation to navigate through differences, disagreements and conflicts of interests. When SOAS delayed the issuing of contracts, or political turbulence caused problems in one of our countries, keeping in regular contact made it possible to work around most of the difficulties. Regular team meetings on Skype were more difficult than anticipated, most often due to internet interruptions in Addis Ababa, but meeting face-to-face at the start of the project enabled us to keep returning to the spirit of working as a team most of the time. That did not necessarily mean that we aligned – in fact two parallel teams developed in Bangladesh influenced by public administration and anthropology traditions respectively – but we found ways to keep the research going even when we had different priorities.

Understanding the different constraints within each country was essential to our negotiations. Some related to the national environments they found themselves working in. Intermittent internet, and the exorbitant expenses of subscriptions to international journals, meant that Bangladeshi and Ethiopian researchers' access to literature was limited. Although the UK colleagues could provide as much material as possible, copyright laws made it difficult to share their institution's resources unless the scholars were employed by SOAS. When reading often impenetrable writing or publishing in international journals, language could act as a barrier. For those researchers for whom English was a second or third language, this put them at a disadvantage. Although the PI/CI edited and proofed various materials, the power of those using English as their first language is obvious. Despite the aim to support national scholars to be sole or co-authors of all the country-based research, according to their choice, the political situation made this impossible. On several occasions the PI put her name (as sole author) on blogs because it might have been dangerous for national scholars to do so. And inequalities between national scholars – on the basis of seniority, age, contacts or language ability – meant that some found it far easier to sole-author publications than others.

Within this research coalition we made it clear that it is national scholars who should have the main parts to play in researching, publishing, networking and influencing policy-makers. The rationale for this was at once both moral (a matter of simple fairness) and practical: national scholars tend to go into more depth, take a longer view and relate specific issues to a bigger picture than visiting expatriate scholars ever could. Nevertheless, though recognising and respecting the contribution of national scholars, there was clearly apparent an international division of labour: It remained the case that the UK researchers co-ordinated the research and obtained funding that allowed colleagues in Bangladesh and Ethiopia to actually carry out the research. At the end of the project when seeking further funding, it was the decision of the UK researchers to include some of the researchers in phase two and bring in new ones from another country.

In the new programme (*Deepening Democracy*) scholars from the Global South have become more involved in the management of the coalition and the design of research. Again, bias was apparent in the institutional structuring of funding arrangements. Although the Principal Investigator (Emma Crewe) tried to properly recognise the scholars at EMReF and FSS by making them Co-Investigators, the rules of the scheme meant that it would have disadvantaged them. The point of the programme was to offer grants to scholars in Myanmar and Ethiopia but Co-Investigators were not allowed to apply. However, the significance of being encouraged by the AHRC to ring-fence a fund for grant-making was transformative. Instead of forcing partner research organisations, chosen by the PI and CI, to design research in a hurry, or worse give approval to the PI/CI's ideas, this meant that the process of design could be deferred and the opportunity open to anyone in these countries rather than just our own contacts. In the first phrase of the programme we have been able to create a grant-making programme, inviting scholars and artists in the Global South to construct their own goals, research questions and methods of inquiry, under three extremely broad themes (representation, exclusion and the links between politics and the arts).

However, there are limits to freedom within our programme for the national scholars creating their own research and in who is deciding which scholars get the grants. First, to be transparent we have articulated what kind of research we will be more likely to fund – multidisciplinary, gender-focused, and strongly influenced by arts and humanities – knowing that this will constrain scholars. Rather than pretending we are open to any proposal on the basis of merit, it seems fairer to warn applicants what is likely to improve their chances. Secondly, the group of people who will decide on which scholars are awarded grants are predominantly European rather than Asian or African researchers (by a ratio of 4 to 3). The PI was so busy thinking that the gender composition (6 women, 1 man) was correcting the usual inequality within large research coalitions, that she failed to create a minority of white UK scholars on this decision-making body. We are doing better on our Advisory Panel (3 African/Asian, 3 diaspora Asian, 3 white UK) (despite the cost of travel to bring them together) but they have infuence and advisory, rather than decision-making, power. So although democracy means more than voting and numbers, in our research coalition we may always struggle to be egalitarian in terms of race and nationality in the face of this. But at least we recognise the importance of the struggle.

Global Hierarchies of knowledge. One ongoing legacy of colonial knowledge collection is for international scholars (meaning those from the Global North) to accept different roles for themselves compared to their 'national' or 'local' counterparts (i.e those in the Global South). We have already seen how academics in elite universities, in collaboration with funding bodies, are often able to set research priorities. This division is further entrenched by an international division of research labour which separates theorisation done by tenured academics that hold the grants from empirical data collection done by southern scholars temporally and precariously employed as part of the time-limited project. In other words, the institutional and organisational structures of academia confine the possibilities for globally comparative theorisation of nationalism, citizenship, democracy and politics to privileged scholars in elite universities, mostly in the Global North. It is easy for white UK academics to collude with this funding regime. Talking informally with other UK academics – either in their universities or at conferences – about their experience of working with scholars in the Global South it is common to hear stories about the difficulties of working with 'local researchers', explaining that they did not complete the research work, that they did not 'have the capacity' or that they ended up collecting the data or writing the report themselves. When one of us asked whether the researchers had had the scope to design their own research, invariably it emerged that they had been contracted to fulfil someone else's workplan. Privately very few supported the idea of the UK government investing more in Africa or

Asia researchers. Publically, when the PI spoke up for investing in Global South researchers at an international conference in South Africa, neither the Euro-American nor the African scholars supported her. When she asked African fellow delegates afterwards what had silenced them one replied that he couldn't back her up because the other UK delegates would have written him off as tricky and stopped giving him contracts. Conversely, one of us reviewed an article recently reflecting on a research coalition composed entirely of UK academics. When trying to account for poor performance – UK academics not responding to emails or failing to attend meetings, struggling to work together to meet their deadlines – the author put it down to 'lack of time'. So while it is capacity that scholars in the Global South lack, it is a shortage of time that apparently explains why scholars in the Global North don't deliver. (Of course lack of time is never an adequate explanation; it merely raises the question, why did the participants choose to prioritise something else.)

So if we were to assume that scholars have equal capacity (in terms of talent, intelligence and commitment), then lack of participation by others in a research coalition needs to be investigated and stronger incentives created for those who show disinterest. It was stressed from the beginning that the ownership of the *Parliamentary Effectiveness* research was collective even if the responsibility for making it happen rested with the UK Principal Investigator (Emma Crewe at SOAS) and Co-Investigator (Ruth Fox at Hansard Society). When planning this research the UK researchers put the development of all researchers' capacity as one of the aims, against which we have been reporting progress to the donor, to ensure that the PI/CI did not dominate decision-making or claim more recognition. We created incentives for ourselves to support colleagues. For example, the PI and CI proposed that publications would be jointly planned and that they would not use the data collected by colleagues on Bangladesh or Ethiopia themselves to publish anything on their own. Every publication about the country research would be primarily authored by national researchers, although the PI and/or CI may be added as a co-author by those national researchers if they made a significant contribution. Thus, aside from the ethical reasons for this approach of giving credit according to contribution rather than position on the project, it was also a way of creating incentives to ensure that all researchers aspired for high quality, strong rigour and intense productivity.

Recognising hierarchies in undertaking research. The power relations between researchers and the elites being studied in this research meant that the specific nationality, class and gendered identity of all those involved played vital roles in shaping conclusions, how they were produced, negotiated and received. Since the researchers in our coalition interpreted our findings differently, even the analysis of our findings required negotiation between multiple perspectives. Reflexive research demands an emergent approach. In this project such emergence involved trial and error and working out our assumptions about Parliament, democracy, and poverty reduction, what questions we were interested in, how we were going to pursue an inquiry into those questions, making sense of what we found and what people say, conceal or don't say, reviewing our assumptions, seeing what new questions we were interested in and so on. One implication of this is that not only will each study of Parliament be different, because each is embedded in different cultures, politics and time, but the study of the same Parliament will contain variations within it because of the identity of the researcher and their relationships with informants. We tried to make sure that the team of researchers all had the intellectual space to pursue their own agendas.

One of our disagreements concerned the issue of gender. This is little doubt that women researchers worldwide have fewer opportunities to carry out research or to gain recognition for their intellectual work. Aside from the principle of equal opportunities, this matters because in political research in particular the diversity of researchers is important when the aim is to

understand plural views. The following example comes the *Parliamentary Effectiveness* programme after we had debated how to include women researchers (or even whether they were necessary) and whether identity influenced results. To test the issue of how gender might impact on research encounters we devised a methodological experiment:

An interview was conducted with a group of women MPs by four researchers: Emma (a white British woman), a white British man, a senior male Ethiopian scholar and a female Ethiopian researcher. While all the researchers were present, the MPs were determined to stress the strength of their party and government and their successful efforts at promoting gender equality. The impression given was that women politicians were tough, dynamic and invulnerable. Recognising the post-colonial character of this encounter, Emma made several comments during the interview to stress that our (the Brits') intention was not to advise them about strengthening Parliament along the Westminster model, responding to a clear and understandable hostility toward foreign interference in politics. Then, by prior agreement, for the last few minutes of the interview the two men left to see if this influenced how the women MPs spoke to us and what they said. Now, with only women interviewers present, one of the women MPs asked about the experience of British women MPs. Emma gave some examples of what gendered politics looks like in Westminster: to give a few examples, British women parliamentarians thrive in the House of Lords, are severely under-represented in the Commons and tend to be portrayed in chronically disparaging ways in the media, she argued. She stressed again that the UK did not provide a model to follow.

With the male researchers absent, and once it was clear that there was no pretence of British superiority, the conversation changed abruptly. The women MPs became far more candid about the hostility of some male MPs. Some were allies, but most berated them for raising anything to do with women's concerns, typically commenting, "stopping crying about women all the time, you are dilluting the national interest. We are thinking about the whole country. There are serious security questions – stopping talking about trivia." When asked what it was like being a women MP, one of the interviewees tellingly revealed that "When a woman gets up to speak in the Parliament she is always fearful, thinking 'can I do this?' whereas a man never worries." Whether this was true or not – perhaps men are just as nervous but conceal it well – it was clear that this would not have been said in front of the men, and especially the senior national scholar leading our research. This encounter highlighted that women MPs in this country are under pressure to appear invulnerable in the presence of figures of authority or those they are competing against. Such a pattern may be generalizable as there is plenty of evidence to suggest similar dynamics elsewhere (Crewe 2014).

So gender, race, nationality and a history of hierarchy all played a part in shaping this encounter. This influence does not make the observations made during this encounter, or the interpretations made afterwards, less reliable than a neutral encounter: there is no such thing as a neutral interview or meeting uninfluenced by people's history, emotions and identity. As long as the researchers reflect on how their research is produced by relationships and assumptions, and record this in as much detail as possible and write it into their account, then rigour is more likely to be achieved. Rigour is achieved not by feigning neutrality but by reflection on one's presuppositions and making cross-cultural comparisons. Democratising research inevitably requires reflexivity about the history and identity of the researchers and how these shape research encounters.

Communicating the research Building on the experience of the past, the new research coalition, created under the umbrella of a new network the Global Research Network on Parliaments and

People, aims to further redress the inequalities inherent in international collaborations in the way it communicates. It is run by a team based in SOAS (University of London) working in collaboration with CIs and partners from the University of Leeds and the Hansard Society in the UK, JNU in India, the Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation in Myanmar and the Forum for Social Studies in Ethiopia. The GRNPP sets out to link researchers, artists and activists and enables them to discuss and imagine what democratic politics might look like in a more engaged and inclusive political world. It does so in the belief that, while the need for historical research on development and democracy is becoming well-established, arts scholarship and initiatives are undervalued in both aid and political worlds.

We have developed the intellectual rationale for the grant-making collectively on the basis of learning from the last project and by relying heavily on the views of colleagues within EMReF and FSS. But the creation of the narrative describing the rationale for the research and how it is communicated is somewhat dominated by the SOAS team. There are under pressure to do this is as the ones with principle responsibility for the programme. Our programme narrative is as follows: we believe that research on the relationship between elected politicians and the people they represent can play a vital role in scrutinising democracy and promoting public engagements. Our rationale emerges out of a crisis in democracy. The challenges for democracy across the globe are chronic, intensifying and urgent. Where once demagogues and populists were at the fringes now they successfully compete to win elections. The election of Donald Trump has further emboldened other 'Strong men' who have established themselves in Turkey, India, Russia, the Philippines and elsewhere. This raises questions about what is happening within citizens' engagement in politics. A solution to the problem of shallow democracy might be found in efforts to promote what Arjun Appadurai calls 'deep democracy' (2001): local activism by NGOs and social movements combined with global networking working in partnership with states? But why should that necessarily be inclusive or inspire leaders to commit to deepening democracy?

We define the study of democracy broadly so that it can be explored in a myriad of local ways that are attentive to different meanings of political involvement. The most direct beneficiaries of our research will be scholars in politically fragile states, with an intense focus on Myanmar and Ethiopia and a lesser focus on neighbouring fragile states, who will be supported to undertake historical, ethnographic, cultural (especially on gender and sexuality) research and to work with arts organisations to amplify their impact and challenge the dominance of political science. In countries with limits on freedom of speech and the media, scholars can play an especially important role in political scrutiny. We will give preference to those scholars who do not usually get access to funding – women, early career, ethnic minority and young researchers.

The GRNPP encourages links and collaboration across disciplinary boundaries and between the arts, humanities, creative and cultural industries, encouraging inquiries into Parliaments and their relationships with people in ways that deepen democratic participation. This is based on the idea that the arts and creative industries can reveal new perspectives and amplify the impacts of research findings by being imaginative, creative and inclusive in both their research and their communication. As Appadurai points out, tackling global problems, including exclusion and inequalities, and working towards 'deep democracy' will require innovation and imagination; it is the arts that may offer the greatest potential to enable people to innovate and be creative about how to imagine the political world differently.[9] The adoption of research methods and promotion of collaborations between social sciences, arts and humanities are further designed to ensure that

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[9] Arjun Appadurai, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLn7MLy7zPY, accessed 11th March 2010.

research findings are not limited to a narrow domain of scholarly investigation that treads well-worn paths. Even if the narrative emerged from a process of consultation, and involves creating space for local meanings, the agreement in taking of sides (pro civil society, pro those usually marginalised, pro multi-disciplinarily) has been made easier by choosing Co-Investigators and partners who agree with these stances.

The political positioning in our communication may become even more complex when our grantees communicate their research. Since we are funding research in societies with profound political divisions, we anticipate difficult decisions about whether and how much to be influenced by grantees' political dispositions. Similarly, we have included into our programme a commitment to support Global South scholars and potential grantees by offering guidance, training and advice about any research process, including giving evidence to the UK Parliament's International Development Select Committee. So far we have advised three scholars/activists from Myanmar to give evidence to their inquiry about DFID's work in Myanmar and Bangladesh – explaining about how to format evidence, what MPs tend to impressed by, and editing when requested. We have not yet been presented with a request to assist with evidence-giving when we disagreed with the content of the evidence. If in our judgement we disagreed with the content to the point that it might risk the safety of the witness or inflame violence, we might decline to help. If you assume, as we do, that ethics is a matter of practical judgement, weighing up the competing values in specific cases (in this case of supporting national scholars against refusing to collude in violence), rather than an abstract ranking and abiding by rules, then this seems to be morally arguable. But this underlines that we should have no illusions of equality in this research work. While UK government is a major aid donor to Myanmar and Ethiopia, and the SOAS team is managing both the finance and key areas of support, we have more significant decision-making power. To pretend otherwise betrays colleagues who need to know where they stand.

4. Conclusions

Legacies of western domination place limits on our ability to understand the world, to empathise with other people and to understand how histories are contested and negotiated. Universities and Parliaments are both pre-eminently 'modern' institutions that can work to exclude alternative formulations and monopolise knowledge and power. Decolonizing and democratisation in these institutions means creating space for debate and for multiple voices to speak and listen to one another.

In the quest to democratising research on Parliaments we recognise the need for a wider definition of politics and for emphasis to be placed on enhancing the voices of those generally less able to speak. The Global Research Networks on Parliaments and People seeks to establish a space in and through which comparative investigations can be promoted. Investigations into the multi-dimensional relationships that exist between Parliaments and people can be global in reach but local in focus. In doing so, research on politics and Parliaments can reveal – and help us to challenge – the complex and evolving relations of power that shape all of our lives.

Proceeding from the view that scholars can play a role in deepening democracy by developing our understanding of it, this paper has considered how best to support the study of Parliament and politicians in their relationships with people in society. We first sought to identify the obstacles – practical, cultural and institutional – that prevent scholars in the Global South from setting priorities, accessing funding or communicating the results of their research on an equal basis. This has allowed us to outline ways in which we might create opportunities for those seeking to

undertake research on democratic institutions, public engagement and political participation. In doing so we address the methodological challenges that arise from such research, the institutional differences that complicate partnerships between scholars in the Global North and the Global South, and the ethical issues that arise from collaborative attempts to deepen democracy in politically fragile states.

Since the world of development has become increasingly industrialized, it is in the marketplace of research funding that we find a powerful potential for challenging inequalities in the academy. In this programme the Arts and Humanities Research Fund and Global Challenges Research Fund have created an opportunity to move beyond co-design, production and authoring. Scholars in the Global South will be able take full control of these processes and gain recognition for their work, even if the UK academics dominate the decision-making about who is included and excluded in the wider network.

Like any political project, there are matters of principle and expediency at stake. Embarking on a process that challenges neo-colonial power can be argued on grounds of justice if it entails expanding opportunities for those who have been kept out of the limelight. But it will also lead to better quality research in local contexts. This research has the potential to play a vital role in the scrutiny of politics and society more generally. We have also discussed some of the ethical dilemmas, and limits to decolonisation, that present challenges, concluding that to pretend to be offering equality in a situation of continuing neo-colonialism would be a form of political hypocrisy. So we suggest that alongside decolonizing research coalitions both honesty and getting beyond a shallow appearance of democracy are the principled and expedient ways forward.

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