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Abstract

Many national and multinational interventions have proven toothless in addressing global challenges such as those defined by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This article addresses SDG 16 'Peace, justice and strong institutions' and elaborates on how indigenous knowledge can contribute to fostering this goal. The theoretical framework relates SDG 16 to the concept of interculturality as promoted by liberation theology. This framework is translated into a methodology by pursuing a sociology-of-knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD), thus comprising a focus on power relations and on the social construction of knowledge and realities. This article analyzes indigenous approaches to conflict transformation across all inhabited continents and provides a systematization of these approaches as well as insight into their shared characteristics, resulting in a theoretic discourse on the subject. While this synthesized discourse is inevitably an expression of Western academia, a decolonialization of the very same is called for, particularly regarding development research. This article therefore concludes on a note of how global goals, such as SDG 16, can be fostered through the collaboration of indigenous peoples, NGOs, academia, politics, and the broader public, thus bringing together the different traditions of thought in an intercultural polylogue.

Key words: Sustainable Development Goals; Indigenous knowledge; Peace and conflict; Decolonialization; United Nations; Discourse

1. Introduction

In heterogeneous societies in a globalized world, an important identifier of conflicts can be the ethnic identity of the conflict parties, for instance, in the case of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples are frequently subject to severe marginalization as reflected in high scores of political and economic discrimination (Minorities at Risk Project, 2009). As their philosophy and way of life do not necessarily abide by the norms of the dominant mainstream culture, their theoretical and practical contributions to successful conflict transformation tend to go unrecognized. In the past ten years, inspiring publications on indigenous methods of conflict transformation have been published. However, with few exceptions, as for instance Adebayo and Benjamin's *Indigenous conflict management strategies: Global perspectives* (2014), many of these publications are illustrative case studies applying heterogeneous definitions and metrics to describe indigenous conflict-management strategies or they focus on a specific geopolitical and social

context. Thus discussions that would allow for reflection on these strategies within a broader scope are scarce.

While indigenous knowledge tends to go unrecognized by the so-called West, individual and national as well as many multinational traditions of thought and action have been toothless, addressing global challenges such as those defined by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. This contribution addresses SDG 16 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions' and elaborates on how indigenous knowledge can contribute to fostering this goal. It thereby connects to the recommendation expressed by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2020, p. 15) that '[a]cademia and other interested parties should further study the interrelationships between customary law and order, formal systems of law and identify good practices in intercultural dialogue'. More specifically, this contribution seeks to challenge the continued 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 1999).

While centuries have passed since the conquest of the Americas as the onset of the power dynamics which allow for the hegemonic positioning of the Global North to this day, and while decades have passed since Quijano coined the expression of the coloniality of power, the issue at stake remains highly relevant. Despite all advances in individual areas of power dynamics, regarding first and foremost the issue of personhood, the coloniality of power all too often remains an invisible, ignored or negated reality on the part of Western realities. The specific characteristics may be different from the situation Quijano was describing but the prevalence of predatory practices continues. Perhaps the most current adaptation of the coloniality of power is 'data colonialism' (Couldry & Mejias, 2019) as a phenomenon of the twenty-first century that, while transcending the traditional geographical tensions of colonialism, captures how a concept as comprising as Big Data is based on the dichotomy of colonizer elites and the colonized, both on a global and a national scale. Big Data within this perspective is linked to predatory practices that shape what is known about whom and by whom, including questions of knowledge categorization, assumed universalism, and centers of knowledge production as part of the geopolitics of knowledge (Ricaurte Quijano, 2018).

The power of knowledge remains crucial across the ages as the prerequisite not only for engaging in discussion but for establishing the agenda of the discussion itself. Linking this concern to indigenous peoples and to SDG 16, this contribution asks how the epistemological hegemony of peace can be altered to transform systemic conflict and increase social equity. For this purpose, it first introduces the theoretical framework before commenting on the applied methodology and its challenges. This contribution then presents a sample of indigenous approaches to conflict transformation and suggests a systematization thereof. The subsequent discussion and a quick excursus on decolonialization in research address how global goals like SDG 16 can be fostered through collaboration with indigenous peoples, NGOs, academia, politics, and the broader public, thus bringing together the different traditions of thought in an intercultural polylogue. The concluding remarks highlight the necessity to act without delay in order to foster SDG 16 and social equity in general.

2. Indigenous Peoples and the International Agenda for Peace

The Agenda 2030 was developed not only by the UN Member States but also in cooperation with indigenous peoples. Attributed to this degree of inclusivity is the explicit mentioning in the Agenda of indigenous peoples, their vulnerability, and their need for inclusion, which amount to a total of six times comprising the political declaration, the targets of SDG 2 (zero hunger) and SDG 4 (quality education) as well the follow-up and review section (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2020). This implies major progress compared to the Millennium Development Goals, which had failed to explicitly mention indigenous peoples at all (United Nations General Assembly, 2000; Secretary-General, 2001). The shortcomings of Agenda 2030 are nevertheless self-evident in the lack of attention given to indigenous peoples' self-determined development, the recognition and protection of their territories, resources, and knowledge and other needs, many of which were promises made in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) back in 2007 (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2007).

Of particular relevance to humankind in general and, given their frequent marginalization, to indigenous peoples in particular is SDG 16. It entails the general positive targets of fostering institutions and transparency, non-discriminatory laws, and inclusivity at all levels of decision-making as well as the negative target of 'reduc[ing] all forms of violence' (United Nations General Assembly, 2015, p. 25). It thus comprises both positive and negative peace according to Galtung (1969). What the description of this goal lacks, though, is explicit mentioning of indigenous peoples, their vulnerability as subjects of marginalization – both historic and current – as well as their potential, specifically in terms of indigenous knowledge on conflict transformation. As established by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues:

To achieve truly lasting peace, marginalization of and discrimination against indigenous peoples, as well as the expropriation of their lands, must end; their own conflict-resolution systems must be recognized and applied to their specific situations; and national laws and peace accords must guarantee their rights as laid out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. (2020, p. 2)

Indigenous peoples have rarely experienced reconciliation and compensation for past injustices; all too often, national and international judiciary systems have failed to address the abuse of indigenous peoples while simultaneously denying indigenous institutions of conflict transformation the authority to establish justice (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2020). Even if in a specific regional context the immediate violence against indigenous peoples has ceded, the relationship with the dominant society frequently fails to transcend that of negative peace (Galtung, 1969). This includes the fact that the epistemological sovereignty on peace continues to exclude indigenous knowledge and, linked to this, the 'supposed primacy of Western scientific knowledge production works largely to maintain the cultural arrogance that perpetuates inexcusable social, ecological and globally exploitative practices' (Hickey & Austin, 2011, p. 84).

As non-discriminatory practices are a condition for indigenous peoples' access to the benefits of other SDGs, including the access to land, succeeding with the implementation of SDG 16 is key. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues points to the importance of UNDRIP as a framework within which individual and collective rights may be accomplished (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2007). Among the expressed demands is the claim for legal pluralism which would allow indigenous institutions, customs and laws to coexist with national legal systems (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2007).

For legal pluralism to be implemented as a reliable access to justice, indigenous and non-indigenous approaches would have to be harmonized – not in the sense of assimilationist practices but in the sense of entering a dialogue as equal partners to establish responsibilities and, most of all, work towards mutual understanding. To ensure that this dialogue take place at eye-level such that the meta-level of epistemological exchange on peace be free of (colonially tainted) hierarchies, the concept of interculturality as promoted by liberation theologians Estermann (2010) and Fernet-Betancourt (2001) is suggested as a practical approach. Interculturality presupposes relations on eye level between two or more cultures with the purpose of reciprocally inspiring each other for the greater good of all, such that the polylogic character of interculturality can be linked to epistemic processes on the theoretical level, and legal settings and actions on the practical level. Importantly, such an understanding includes acknowledging the preliminary character of this approximation to an explanation of intercultural dialogue or polylogue, thus avoiding to turn the means of non-hierarchical interaction into a tool of historically established hierarchies (Fernet-Betancourt, 2001).

3. Methodology

Peace has various facets as frequently illustrated by Galtung's famous distinction between negative and positive peace (Galtung, 1969). As also implied by this distinction, peace – and its counterpart conflict – are closely intertwined with power dynamics between different groups and individuals. Within the realm of discourse analysis, Foucault's reflections on discourse theory, first and foremost comprised in his epoch-making book *Archaeology of knowledge* (first published as *Archéologie du savoir* in Paris in 1969) (Foucault, 1981) but also his plethora of writings and interviews on power (Foucault, 2004; 2005), continue to be central when reflecting on the critical role of power for constructing and reconstructing discourses and intergroup relations. Yet greater emphasis was laid on the **social** construction of knowledge by Berger and Luckmann's groundbreaking *Social construction of reality* (1968). Explicitly inspired by both, Foucault's focus on power and Berger and Luckmann's focus on the constructed character of our discursive reality, Keller (2005, p. 3) established the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD) with the purpose...

... to analyse ongoing and heterogeneous processes of the social construction – production, circulation, transformation – of knowledge. This comprises the analysis of symbolic order on institutional and

organizational levels and arenas as well as the effects of such on ordering in different social field of practice. (p. 3)

Discourses, again, are 'identifiable ensembles of cognitive and normative devices [...] produced, actualized, performed and transformed in social practices [...] at different social, historical and geographical places' (Keller, 2005, pp. 3-4). SKAD is thereby not understood as a specific theory or concrete methodology – though, as a synthesis within the interpretative paradigm, SKAD does endorse the tools of grounded theory (Strauss, 1998) – but as a general epistemological approach. It can thus be considered to be combinable with a polylogic approximation to a specific subject, such that SKAD and interculturality can be contemplated together.

To identify a sample of indigenous approaches to conflict transformation, various combinations of the keywords 'indigenous', 'conflict transformation', 'conflict management', 'peaceful coexistence', and 'alternative dispute resolution' were entered into academic (academia.edu and researchgate.net) and non-academic (google.com) search engines.¹ Following Keller's recommendation to rely on tools of grounded theory (Strauss, 1998), theoretical sampling was applied to the results (Keller, 2005). Approaches from all inhabited continents as well as from settings in which the conflicts in question ranged from situations of everyday arbitration to attempts at establishing post-trauma (genocide) reconciliation were reviewed and coded, thus paying tribute to the geographical, historical, and cultural embeddedness of the specific discourse manifestations (Keller, 2005). Further coding was most attentive to the metalevel of indigenous knowledge conveyed in literature, but less so to the actual phrasing given the highly diverse character of descriptions (many of which were available to the author only as translations, thus resembling semi-authentic expressions of the underlying philosophies and practices). The identification of the sample resulted in a tentative systematization of the contexts of application of these indigenous approaches to conflict transformation.

The SKAD approach further allowed for a systematization of common features of indigenous conflict transformation which was condensed into a theoretic discourse on the subject. It must be noted, however, that this 'translation' of indigenous knowledge into academic reflection is just one possible interpretation of the available means and conflicts and most certainly fails to mirror the full array of diverse expressions of manifold indigenous cultures around the world. As highlighted by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples: 'the customs, laws and judicial institutions of indigenous peoples were as diverse as the many indigenous peoples, communities or nations and cultural groups that inhabited the globe' (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2020, p. 10). While explicitly acknowledging this vivid diversity of cultures, this contribution seeks to highlight specific features that seem particularly characteristic of indigenous approaches to conflict transformation. Without attempting an encompassing juxtaposition with Western discourse in order to not increase othering, this contribution asks which indigenous normative devices and social practices are available to transform conflicts, which categories may be suitable to describe the different approaches, and in which way these indigenous discourses may be aptly recognized by the 'inherently Westernised frames of understanding and

judgement' (Hickey & Austin, 2011, p. 84), which dominate conflict transformation, especially on the national, regional, and international level.

Importantly, as the synthesized discourse abides the phrasing and norms of Western discourse, it no longer is the authentic expression of an indigenous discourse. Despite this flaw on the epistemological meta level, the presentation of indigenous approaches to conflict transformation may be viewed as a cautious contribution towards encouraging Western discourse on conflict transformation to leave behind its epistemological hegemony, open up towards other realities and their constructions of justice, and ultimately engage in a lively intercultural polylogue. For that purpose, however, it would be necessary to go beyond the traditional divide of research and action/practice by pursuing a participatory action research format, within which a discourse analysis in the SKAD format could be an informative piece within a multi-method approach (see chapter 'Excursus: Decolonizing Towards Intercultural Equity').

4. Indigenous Knowledge for Conflict Transformation

Indigenous knowledge systems – just like any non-indigenous equivalent – comprise various aspects ranging from the imparting of knowledge to actual practices (Grenier, 1998) as '[t]hey encompass the sophisticated arrays of information, understandings and interpretations that guide human societies around the globe in their innumerable interactions with the natural milieu' (Nakashima, Prott, & Bridgewater, 2000, p. 11).

Simultaneously, there may be certain differences between non-indigenous and indigenous approaches: Whereas Western systems have been described as analytical and reductionist in nature, indigenous systems may be more intuitive and holistic (Grenier, 1998). This applies also to the way in which this knowledge is imparted, as indigenous knowledge may rely more on storytelling, singing, and perhaps dancing, than on scientific evidence provided in writing. Whereas Western knowledge may seek to explain its approach by referring to written laws and regulations, including in the form of international resolutions such as the SDGs, indigenous knowledge may be more prone to state spiritual and moral aspects (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2020).

As concepts and means of a peaceful coexistence are inherent to all communities, there is a myriad of approaches of interest. While they are culture-specific to the respective indigenous people, the following overview is an approximation for a Western-style systematization based on the reviewed literature. Traditional approaches may have played a role in the associated cultural context for a long time and may have been comparatively less affected by contact with non-indigenous cultures, perhaps they continued as a subdiscourse of the official, national normative discourse. Revitalized approaches have become highly important in the context of conflicts and human rights violations, especially when national means of conflict transformation are largely insufficient or simply out of reach. Such deficiencies on the part of the dominant discourse became the opening doors to allow indigenous subdiscourses to reappear in a broader scale. The insufficiency of Western means may also have led to the politicization of indigenous approaches as a way of reestablishing social cohesion and fostering collective wellbeing. Expressive approaches, again, highlight methods of coping with and tackling

conflict, including by vocalizing one’s emotions. As such they may be the kind of indigenous discourses that, by the West, is perceived the least competitive to its own dominant discourse on conflict transformation (**Error! Reference source not found.**).



Figure 1. Categories of Indigenous approaches – a tentative Western systematization of their application

While indigenous approaches to conflict transformation are manifold, it is possible to identify some common features. **Error! Reference source not found.** synthesizes these characteristics according to the short descriptions presented above. Core is the fully embedded position of the individual as part of not just a family or the entire community but as part of the broader surroundings, the animate and inanimate nature, including the way nature once was, presently is and will be in future.

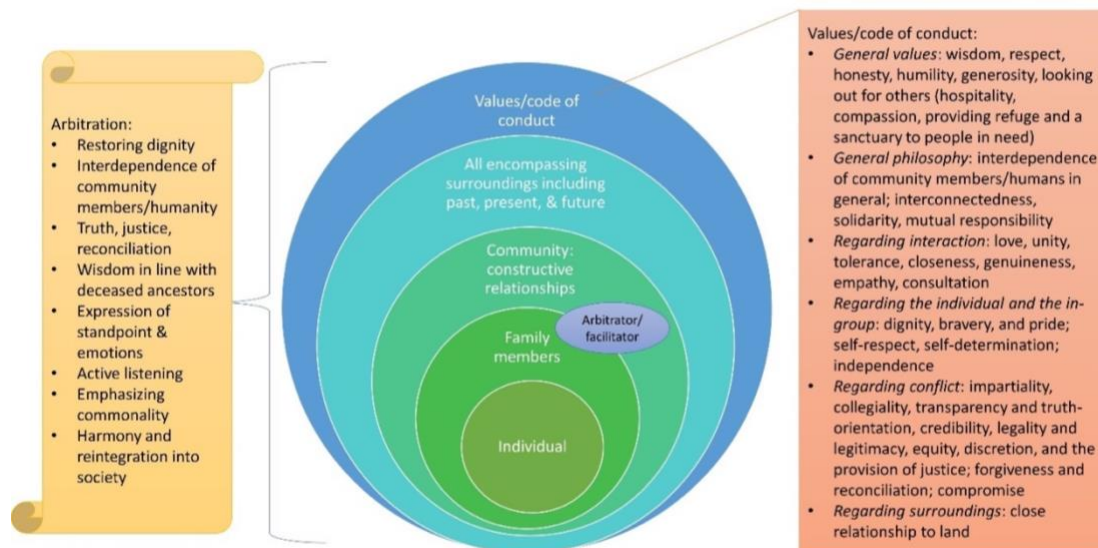


Figure 2. Indigenous conflict transformation: common denominators

4.1 Traditional Approaches

Indigenous approaches that ‘survived’ contact with non-indigenous colonial forces are perhaps the least contested and most traditionally acquainted means of peacekeeping. An example that has found its way into Western attempts of

conflict transformation in the aftermath of 9/11 is that of *Jirga*.² It stems from the Afghan-Pakistani border region, where this institution is used ‘as a strategic exchange between two or more people to address an issue through verbal communication’ (Yousufzai & Gohar, 2005, p. 17). As Yousufzai and Gohar stress, this exchange may not necessarily lead to an agreement between the involved people or groups but as it ensures their continued communication it fosters a peaceful coexistence nevertheless. Moreover, given the political situation in the region, *Jirga* is at times the only body of justice available to Pukhtoon communities, especially as it resembles an affordable and quick process of arbitration. *Jirga* may take place at the national, regional, or local level. It generally involves influential (male) elders of the respective level gathering to reflect on issues of importance to the community. As all stakeholders should be represented and every participant has the right to speak, *Jirga* is considered a decidedly participatory and rather non-hierarchical means of arbitration (Yousufzai & Gohar, 2005).

Jirga relies on the traditional code of conduct among the Pukhtoon, called *Pukhtoonwali* (Yousufzai & Gohar, 2005). This code highly regards the values of honor, bravery, and pride; self-respect and, linked to this, revenge; independence; justice; hospitality, providing refuge and a sanctuary to a person in need; forgiveness and reconciliation; and tolerance and protection as attitudes towards encounters with other people, independent of whether they are strangers or from the same community and thus share these values (Yousufzai & Gohar, 2005).

An example of a code of conduct from North America is the *First Nations’ Wisdom* which displays a holistic worldview of humankind being closely connected to all other living beings and the environment in general as well as to other times in history, thus encompassing past, present, and future. Consequently, humankind is to always act respectfully and responsibly and show foresight as to how decisions might impact the following seven generations (Saier & Trevors, 2010).

Closely related both geographically and in terms of the values expressed therein, are the *Seven Grandfather Teachings* from the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Ottawa who once lived in the region of the Great Lakes in North America. These teachings comprise the values of wisdom, respect, love, honesty, humility, bravery, and truth which are all seen as closely interrelated and which should be expressed in the encounter with both humans and the non-human environment at all times (Klemm Verbos & Humphries, 2014).

4.2 Revitalized Approaches

Other indigenous approaches may internationally be better known due to their recent revitalization and application in complex sociopolitical conflicts than due to their precolonial prevalence. A prominent example is *Ubuntu* in the context of post-Apartheid South Africa under Nelson Mandela’s presidency. To work through the painful South African history, his Government established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to bring (transitional) justice to the country: The TRC was to focus on the reparation, rehabilitation, and restoration of dignity – as human beings and as civilians – of those who had suffered from human rights violations (Tutu, 2019). The TRC employed the concept of *Ubuntu*, that is, the understanding that ‘we are human only through relationship. [...] The completely self-sufficient person is in fact subhuman. [...]

We are made for complementarity' (Tutu, 2013, [01:14-02:20]). Related values are 'caring, compassion, unity, tolerance, respect, closeness, generosity, genuineness, empathy, consultation, compromise, and hospitality' (Masina, 2000, p. 170). Thus, *Ubuntu* is an inclusive worldview that asks to work towards the common good.

Ubuntu can be practiced in everyday life and can moreover be a guideline in customary law. In Southern Africa, Murithi reports, *Ubuntu*-practicing Xhosa have fora of group mediation and reconciliation called *Inkundla/Lekgotla* for issues affecting social cohesion. While these institutions are usually headed by the chief or a council of elders, family members of both victims and perpetrators are involved in the proceedings independent of their gender or age as they partake in the questioning and express their opinion on how to proceed (Murithi, 2009). This process comprises five stages: acknowledging guilt, showing remorse and repenting, asking for and granting forgiveness, and paying compensation or reparations to approach reconciliation, with this last step being the end result of a comprehensive process during which constructive relationships are reestablished. Murithi concludes that *Ubuntu* conflict transformation encompasses four key lessons: the participatory approach, the support that victims and perpetrators receive throughout the process, the acknowledging of guilt/remorse which is met with forgiveness, and the continued interdependence of the community or humanity in general (Murithi, 2009).

Another revitalized approach from the African continent are *Gacaca* village tribunals. Historically, Karbo and Mutisi explain, *Gacaca* courts were outdoor assemblies of community members, during which respected leaders led the process of settling disputes and paved the way towards reconciliation. The hearings often concluded with a shared meal as a symbol for the reconciled relationships (Karbo & Mutisi, 2008). As means of restorative and transitional justice, *Gacaca* courts followed the principles of discovering the truth, establishing justice, and achieving reconciliation (Reimers, 2014). In the aftermath of the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994, *Gacaca* tribunals were slightly modified to address this new scope of perpetration and tried about two million cases between 2005 and 2012 (Reimers, 2014).

Another approach is found in Burundi and refers to highly moral elders called *Bashingantahe*. Naniwe-Kaburahe describes in detail both the historical context of the civil war and the revitalization of the *Bashingantahe* in its aftermath (which was partially supported by the UN Development Programme) as an attempt to achieve transitional justice through mediation, conciliation, and arbitration: *Bashingantahe* are men of great integrity who settle conflicts by seeking justice in line with the wisdom of deceased ancestors, thus invoking traditional cultural values. Among these are impartiality, collegiality, transparency and truth-orientation, credibility, legality and legitimacy, equity, discretion, and the provision of justice as a free social service. To become a *Bashingantahe*, men have to undergo a special training and rite of initiation (Naniwe-Kaburahe, 2008).

Many more indigenous means of conflict transformation have been described as either continuously existing or revitalized, for example, *Palaver* (comprehensive negotiation) and *Mato Oput* (drinking of the bitter herb) in the African continent. The underlying principles and values are usually in line with the concept of providing a healing process not just for the immediately involved individuals but for the entire community (Brock-Utne, 2004). Moreover, these

concepts and means tend to be revitalized after local and regional conflicts whose dimensions go beyond what official juridical institutions are prepared to address in a reasonable timeframe.

4.3 Politicalized Approaches

Some indigenous approaches have transcended their original scope and become synonyms of modern political concepts and claims. Perhaps most widely known is *Satyagraha*, a compound of the two Gujarati words for truth and firmness. Mahatma Gandhi first promoted *Satyagraha* as a spiritually and socially encompassing peaceful resistance when he was in South Africa and experienced the discrimination against the Indian minority, and later *Satyagraha* was employed in order to draw attention to the context of the Salt March of 1930 in India (Dudouet, 2008). Moreover, *Satyagraha* was also passed on to other movements as Martin Luther King, for instance, saw the value of it and incorporated elements thereof into his own strategy in the US Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Another example is closely linked to Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania after its independence in 1961: Nyerere referred to the concepts of *Ujamaa* and *Kujitegemea* to demand togetherness and self-reliance as an indigenous interpretation of socialism in the sense of interconnectedness, solidarity, mutual responsibility, and a corresponding development agenda (Brock-Utne, 2004; Ibhawoh & Dibua, 2003).

Somewhat similarly, *Abya Yala* in the Latin American context has become a term denoting much more than an indigenous name for the American continent as it is used in the context of a decolonizing discourse of indigenous peoples (Estermann, 2009, pp. 1, footnote 2). In Bolivia, *Abya Yala* is linked to the principle of *Vivir Bien*, that is, of a qualitatively good life in harmony with Mother Earth and the potential of humankind functioning as a *Chakana*, a bridge connecting all extremes and aspects of geographic, physiognomic, societal, economic, cultural, and religious diversity (Gallant K. F., 2014). Both the Bolivian *Vivir Bien* and its Ecuadorian counterpart *Buen Vivir*, which has also been interpreted as a life in dignity (Gallant K. F., 2014), were incorporated into their respective national constitutions, thus becoming founding pillars of the national discourse.

Recreating or rather founding a state based on their ethnic identity has also long been the desire of the Kurds. While they were granted the status of autonomy in Iraq, throughout history, Kurdish claims on statehood have not been successful (Gallant Z., 2015). This has brought about for the Kurds the infamous title of 'the largest stateless people in the world' (Bingol & Benjamin, 2014, p. 217), and the political discourse and identity construction of *Kurdistan* is included in research on indigenous conflict transformation. While the religious and linguistic diversity of the Kurdish people may not be fully reflected in the search for a joint Kurdish identity, Bingol and Benjamin do highlight various inclusive components as well as an emphasis on social justice and a rather protective ecological standpoint (Bingol & Benjamin, 2014).³

4.4 Expressive Approaches

Other indigenous means have almost been forgotten. For example, two peoples from the Arctic region historically used singing as a method of conflict

resolution: While among the Inuit song duels were practiced, the Saami used a traditional form of song called *Yoik* to relate to a conflict and express the individual singer's emotions or standpoint – apart from direct negotiation or, if need be, a collegial council called *Norraz* which was headed by a wise man (Gendron & Hille, 2013).

A meeting, though not in form of a council, was also employed by the Maori in New Zealand. Anyone who was interested in or relevant to the discussion of a dispute at village level was welcome to join the *Hui*. This meeting was used to reach a consensus and lasted until this goal was met. Attendants had the opportunity to speak one after another. Thereby, the talk called *Koreo* avoided directly addressing the issue at stake and instead heavily relied on active listening to what previous speakers had said, thus emphasizing the commonality and giving continuance to the dialog until an agreement was reached (Love, 2007; Smith et al., 2021).

5. Discussion

Engaging with indigenous knowledge allows to broaden the horizon towards an intercultural understanding, including approaches to conflict transformation. Undertaking the task of drawing up a tentative systematization, while in itself a Westernized endeavor, may help researchers, practitioners, and politicians socialized in the West to recognize by which means and in which situations indigenous approaches to conflict transformation have played a role and may be employed to this day as well as in future. Distinguishing four different categories, we find traditional approaches to be 'survivors' of predatory practices, whose potential tends to go unnoticed by the (inter-)national normative discourse today (e.g., *First Nations' Wisdom*). Exceptions from this pattern seem to occur only in national situations of crisis which raise international concern, for instance, the quest for a post-Taliban government in Afghanistan which led to the *Loya Jirga* being convened in Bonn, Germany, under the auspices of the United Nations (Shah, 2002). Expressive approaches also tend to go unnoticed or be marginalized to the realm of anthropological exhibits, though aspects thereof may be found in psychological exercises (e.g., active listening) and therapy beyond their culture of origin (e.g., *Koreo*). Similarly, rap, dance, and graffiti battles in US inner cities have been viewed an alternative to gang violence (Solomon, 2013). While members of these gangs are usually non-indigenous, particularly in the case of African Americans whose indigeneity was stolen from them when their ancestors were enslaved, they do share with the majority of indigenous peoples that they, too, suffer marginalization at the hands of the dominant society.

Revitalized and politicized approaches, in contrast to traditional and expressive approaches, may be more familiar to a Western audience due to the press coverage they receive. Yet the media tends to associate both with situations of crisis: In the case of revitalized approaches these crises include long times of severe segregation (*Ubuntu*), bloody civil war (e.g., *Bashingantahe*) as well as a rapidly committed genocide (*Gacaca*); in the case of politicized approaches the voicing of indigenous interests and inter-indigenous cohesion may also pose a threat to the predatory systems established by the colonizers (e.g., *Abya Yala*, *Kurdistan*), many of which the West benefits from to this day (Gallant K. F., 2014; Gallant Z., 2016). These two

examples clearly highlight that indigenous approaches to conflict transformation are not a panacea that would appease all stakeholders without further ado. Rather, fostering negative or positive peace requires great effort (Galtung, 1969) and willingness of the stakeholders to turn away from violence, engage in dialogue and pursue justice.

Identifying common denominators across the individual indigenous approaches and established categories, the core characteristic was the interrelatedness of the individual with all surroundings, be they family or broader community, animate or inanimate, referring to the past, the present or the future (e.g. *Chakana*, *Ubuntu*). This observation also links to the crucial importance that access to land and territorial rights have in indigenous discourse. Conflicts may arise over access to land and resources; simultaneously, indigenous territories are praised for ‘contain[ing] 80 per cent of the world’s biological diversity’ (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2021, p. 7) thanks to sustainable indigenous land management, thus linking indigenous knowledge to various goals established within the scope of the Agenda 2030.

This is an expression not of indigenous knowledge being the new dominant discourse – the new normal – but a call for it to become part of a new more comprehensive discourse which would be better suited to assess the great challenges of our times and establish and implement best practices. The closely intertwined character of the SDGs is highly compatible with the holistic perspective inherent to many indigenous worldviews. Moreover, the holistic understanding of conflict and conflict transformation is reflected in the emphasis on restorative/transformational justice expressed by many indigenous approaches (Schliesser, 2015).

Recognizing indigenous knowledge increases the agency of conflict-struck communities and their identification with proposed processes, both of which foster conflict transformation (Benjamin & Lundy, 2014). Moreover, research has emphasized that former victims may become perpetrators if they react to their perceived vulnerability by self-protective violence, legitimized by a sense of retributive justice (Staub et al., 2005). Thus, engaging in a polylogue of cultures including all stakeholders can also be a preventive measure fostering an intercultural encounter which in its very nature is a constructive interaction.

What indigenous approaches lack is not potential but promotion via widely respected for a. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the World Social Forum,⁴ the Right Livelihood Award⁵ and similar institutions that acknowledge ideas and practices for the greater good beyond mainstream Western discourse are only a starting point. What is needed is an incorporation of indigenous knowledge into curricula related to philosophy and conflict transformation in such a way that academic perspectives are complimented with first-hand experience through alliances with indigenous organizations, NGOs, the broader – diverse – public, and, ideally, political actors both on the national and the international level.

Fostering the recognition of indigenous knowledge should not be a cause in itself, but should be followed by a change in awareness and a decolonialization of the practical encounter with non-Western communities. This includes the actual implementation of means of peacekeeping and conflict transformation that are either inherent to the affected communities or that derive from the intercultural exchange between culturally heterogeneous communities. Thereby, the intercultural encounter itself is already a means of peacekeeping

even if, like with *Koreo*, the issue of dispute is never openly addressed (Love, 2007; Smith et al., 2021). Drawing demarcation lines of national identities and fighting for independence may become less pertinent when aggressive othering is replaced by stressing common characteristics through intercultural polylogue. Given that many indigenous approaches resemble a holistic worldview as they strive for the greater good of all, *Ubuntu*, *Vivir Bien*, and similar concepts seem well suited to address not just intractable conflicts but also the existential threat of climate change.

As stated by Avila Santamaría (2019, p. 6) in a paper prepared for the International Expert Group Meeting on ‘Peace, justice and strong institutions: the role of indigenous peoples in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16’:

Recognizing the identity of the peoples and their ability to contribute, participating legitimately in decision-making spaces, and distributing wealth and social opportunities, are the challenges of justice. Contemporary societies may face complex and urgent problems such as climate change, migration, human trafficking, artificial intelligence, wars and more.

States must open spaces to value and learn from many practices of indigenous peoples. Maybe we can find a real and concrete justice for all.(p.6)

6. Excursus: Decolonizing Towards Intercultural Equity

Avila Santamaría’s call to learn from indigenous peoples only mentions states as actors who should set the frame for implementing these learning spaces. Yet there is no need to stop at this rather abstract and superordinate level: At a conference back in April 2022,⁶ the question was raised how discourse analysis could be more relevant and influential to politics. This question clearly goes beyond the understanding of discourse analysis as a method for analyzing the state of affairs expressed in utterances and underlying structures. It implies that analysis and critical reflection not be limited to be a purpose in themselves; instead, they should leave behind the ivory tower and actually affect the construction of realities. This contribution tunes in with this demand as it addresses a niche discourse to highlight its potential for becoming part of an internationally recognized mainstream discourse. Within academia in general, an important step in this direction, which furthermore is made explicit by SDG 17 ‘Global partnership for sustainable development’ (United Nations General Assembly, 2015), is taken through seeking to develop projects in close cooperation with partners in the Global South. However, this practice seems insufficient, especially as these co-researchers and co-authors do not necessarily enter the memorandum of understanding from the same position of power as a Western researcher or research institution but are bound last but not least by the power asymmetries established through colonialization and associated practices (Kanashiro Uehara, et al., 2023). It is a pitfall to assume that having ‘foreign’ names and institutions local of the Global South on a research paper equals decolonialization; ever so often the relationship of North and South is reminiscent of constructing straw persons who facilitate the access to data and whose names supposedly grant authenticity to the research project.

These dangers have clearly been addressed by researchers, practitioners, and communities in the Global South, for instance in a publication by the Sustainable Futures in Africa (SFA) Network with the telling title *A critical resource for ethical international partnerships* (2020).

For academics from the Global North it can be a valuable experience to spend time in the Global South – neither as a tourist nor within the scope of a short-term research stay abroad but to experience a ‘second socialization’ in a cultural context foreign to that of our upbringing. Leaving one’s comfort zone and becoming the stranger, even if still privileged socioeconomically, can sensitize our perspective for different realities.

Further, participatory research formats which aim to focus the research on issues of **explicit** relevance to the intended beneficiaries (who usually go beyond the group of contributing academics in development research) and design the research around a corpus of data collected not just in the local context of marginalized communities but potentially gathered in close cooperation with these communities might be a means of decolonizing power. Citizen science, for instance as citizen social science and tracking science⁷ (Lorenz & Lepenies, 2023), especially for phrasing the research question and collecting the data but also for monitoring and evaluation, might be a promising approach depending on the field of interest. Data, in terms of the corpus for the subsequent discourse analysis via methods of Grounded Theory (Strauss, 1998) might then be analyzed in a dialogical or polylogical setting with community volunteers, especially as the identification of interpretative schemes require a sound knowledge of the cultural context. Conducting the analysis in a polylogical intercultural setting might in fact be particularly productive as it would allow for both the insider knowledge and the outsider distance for undertaking the epistemological task.

Similarly, research approaches with a social justice dimension like participatory traditions inspired by the philosophy endorsed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (2005) seem suitable options to consider within the challenge of decolonizing development research by adapting SKAD to the specific geopolitical context. Participatory action research like Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) or Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) is frequently advocated for in health-related research to ‘integrate community partners throughout research processes’ (Wallerstein, et al., 2020, p. 380) to preempt stereotyping and further marginalization through the power dynamics of the act of conducting research itself. In the context of conflict transformation, however, these formats remain underused despite their methodological setup being perfectly in line with the concept of bringing different stakeholders to the table to constructively work towards a common good (Neufeldt & Janzen, 2021).

Instead of reducing individuals and communities in ‘developing’ countries to objects of research, their voices as subjects with expertise of their own context need to be heard and amplified. Just like Freire (2005) believed that education is always political, we must recognize that research, especially development research, is always political. As members of communities associated with colonialization, it then becomes our moral imperative to rethink our customary research practices and revise our position in the international power dynamics. This is not to silence Western voices but to engage in truly intercultural and politically liberating partnerships with researchers, communities and individuals in the Global South. In order to approximate this goal, comparative

research designs might be promising in that discourses from disempowered settings in the Global South and the Global North are compared by an international team of researchers, including members of the researched communities themselves. In the context of development research and particularly relevant to **both** geopolitical contexts, while often threatening indigenous peoples very survival, would be studies on the nexus of climate, conflict, and migration (Behnassi et al., 2022). Here, discourses from communities of origin, migrants, and receiving communities could all be investigated within the framework of an interculturally adapted SKAD analysis. While the ultimate goal of power equity will not come within reach without decolonizing the money trails, such a research design could at least enhance the capital of all parties involved (Bourdieu, 1983). Hitherto uninvolved individuals and institutions could finally benefit from this research by decolonizing not just the access to academic results in form of open-access publications but by fostering social-justice oriented open science.

7. Conclusion: Bringing About Intercultural Polylogue

‘Postmodern philosophy and theology have not achieved to de-hellenise European thinking, because the Hellenistic “software” of European mainstream thinking cannot be revealed from within, but only in a dialogue or polylogue with cultural and human alterity’, writes Estermann (2021, p. 146) and calls for implementing interculturality as a turning point in the established (neo-)colonial power relations.

Taking a merely historical perspective on indigenous knowledge and thus banishing indigeneity to the artisanal and museum realm runs danger of romanticized othering instead of engaging with empowering and inspirational indigenous peoples. Similarly, viewing indigenous knowledge merely as a topic of epistemological analysis of so-called alternative knowledge systems sentences indigenous peoples and their contributions to addressing pressing modern problems to a life behind the bars of the ivory tower.

In a globalized world, contact between different cultures has become ubiquitous such that modern information and communication technologies and transnational networks are not limited to spreading Western values; they can also be employed to increase the voice of marginalized and poor people (many of whom are indigenous) across regions and cultural divides. Cultural diversity of participants and topics of learning settings or international polylogue then have the potential to catalyze both the knowledge gain and the facilitation of social equity (Gallant K. F., 2019).

Naturally, means of peacekeeping are not infallible and will, depending on the context, show certain limitations in their implementation, for which indigenous means have been similarly criticized (Schliesser, 2015). Yet, despite the fact that not all indigenous means are fully in line with the Human Rights or the SDGs as, for instance, women are not always included as stakeholders, the spirit of these same international charters demands that indigenous knowledge be recognized and respected. Only then does an enriching intercultural encounter become possible – and means for contributing to achieving the SDGs can be employed to the best of humankind’s abilities.

Finally, a philosophic-pragmatic perspective must recognize that both cultural relativism and Western approaches have been unable to tackle the big

challenges of our times on their own. Thus, there is a need for further approaches to conflict transformation such as those expressed by indigenous knowledge. Given that indigenous peoples are heavily affected by conflict as defined in SDG 16, as well as suffering from many other injustices as expressed in the other SDGs, broadening our horizon and including all communities as stakeholders in designing our joint present and future is pressing. Therefore, in both academia and politics, a continued decolonialization of Western approaches by learning about other peoples' worldviews, ideally within a liberating, equity- and justice-enabling intercultural polylogue is crucial to a peaceful coexistence. Ultimately, failing to hear and support the voice of those most in need will only ignite further conflicts as Martin Luther King (1968: [online]), commonly referred to as an ardent pacifist, explained in the light of systemic violence:

I am still committed to militant, powerful, massive, non-violence as the most potent weapon in grappling with the problem from a direct action point of view. I'm absolutely convinced that a riot merely intensifies the fears of the white community while relieving the guilt. ... But it is not enough for me to stand before you tonight and condemn riots. It would be morally irresponsible for me to do that without, at the same time, condemning the contingent, intolerable conditions that exist in our society. These conditions are the things that cause individuals to feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard. ... [America] has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity.

Analyzing the discourses of conflict transformation does not have to be limited to a purpose in itself but could also be linked to changing both the dominant discourse on the subject and, most importantly, the promoted practices, thus co-constructing the (new!) normal.

Disclaimer

There is a certain irony in the author of this contribution pertaining to the setting of the colonial oppressor. By virtue of being born a German citizen of Prussian decent, I am not and can never be a representative of those suffering from the discriminatory practices of (neo-)colonialization. Despite this fact, I am writing these lines to express recognition for those who have been engaging in decolonizing both academia and the broader geopolitical context, most notably the money trails associated with injustice and inequity. All I can do is to encourage all those passing for members of a dominant (Western) society, to seek authentic non-touristic encounters with people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, to listen carefully to their stories, learn from their knowledge, and work towards decolonizing yourselves. If it raises uncomfortable questions about your identity, you are doing it right.

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Notes

1. The initial search was conducted in late 2013, though following the author's continued engagement with the subject new search results have been reviewed and, if applicable, incorporated since.
2. The US Government invited a *Loya Jirga* (national Afghan conference) to Bonn in 2002 (Yousufzai & Gohar, 2005, p. 8).
3. Admittedly, Iraqi Kurdistan sits on some of the most profitable oil reserves in the world, which plays a role in negotiations with global powers, thus not ruling out actions at the expense of the environment, despite the focus on ecology in discourse (Gallant Z., 2016).
4. The World Social Forum was initiated in 2001 as a meeting space for social movements, networks, and civil society organizations seeking for alternatives to neoliberalism and imperialism. For more information, please visit <https://wsf2022.org/queeselforo/> [last accessed July 19, 2023].
5. The Right Livelihood Award, commonly also referred to as the Alternative Nobel Prize, was established in 1980 and is dedicated to supporting persons working towards peace, justice, and sustainability for all of humankind. Further information can be found at <https://rightlivelihood.org/about-us/who-we-are/> [last accessed July 19, 2023].
6. *Decolonising discourse studies: qualitative research on (non)discursive and postcolonial construction of realities*, realized in a hybrid format in Augsburg and digitally by the University of Augsburg & COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) from April 21 to April 23, 2022, and funded by the European Union. The workshop program is available at https://www.idos-research.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/veranstaltungen/2022/20220421_Programme_COST-Workshop.pdf [last accessed July 12, 2023].
7. As explained by Lorenz and Lepenies (2023), citizen social science is explicitly concerned with diversity and inclusion as well as self-determination and pursues those goals not just in theory but within a collective-action framework intended to foster the well-being of humankind and beyond. Yet, Lorenz and Lepenies see a shortcoming in the concept of this approach in that it remains within the realms of academia instead of critically reflecting on the role of science and conducting research or the concept of citizenship. Tracking science aims to rectify this mindset by referring to Indigenous peoples whose ancestors may have paved the way for today's 'science' as they tracked animals, thus using their knowledge to systematically pursue their interests.

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