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Transnational Academic Mobility and Co-Production of Knowledge between the Global South and North: The Case of Ethiopian Academics in Germany

According to studies measuring Global academic output, Africa contributes only 2% of the world's research output. Drawing on the theory of epistemic injustice, co-production as a knowledge democracy, coloniality of knowledge, and the new mobility paradigm, this research explores the implications of transnational academic mobility between the Global South and the North for the co-production and decolonisation of knowledge. Moreover, this study examines mobility trajectories, challenges, and strategies for advancing equitable knowledge production. Methodologically, this study relies on a qualitative research approach, a case study research design, and thematic and content analysis, and draws on multiple data sources (in-depth interviews, participant observation, and informal conversations). Research participants were selected through non-probability purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Accordingly, the study's findings revealed an increasing flow of academics from the Global South to the Global North. The increasing unidirectional mobility of academics is driven by the availability of infrastructure (libraries, internet, books), access to quality education, and the presence of well-trained professors across different disciplines in the Global North. Moreover, socio-economic and political crises in the Global South contribute to this increasing trend of South-North academic mobility. This implies that transnational academic mobility is not only career-driven but also a strategy to escape the polycrisis in origin countries. The study also found that transnational academic mobility has both positive and negative implications for the co-production of knowledge and the decolonisation of knowledge production. On the one hand, transnational academic mobility plays a critical role in the co-production and decolonisation of knowledge in academia. On the other hand, the mass unidirectional South-North mobility of academics may serve as a tool for colonial continuity. Moreover, the study revealed different structural barriers, including funding inequalities, that sustained the intellectual division of labour, the rise of populism in the West, on the one hand and mobile academics' integration challenges and homesickness, on the other hand, which affect Global South academics' engagement in collaborative projects and co-production of knowledge. Furthermore, the study recommends decoupling research partnerships from the capacity-building approaches, expanding South-North and South-South Research partnerships, and advancing transformative Global South-Global North Collaborations as strategies to advance equitable knowledge production.