




CHALLENGING COLONIAL PRACTICES IN RESEARCH: A GUIDE FOR PHD RESEARCHERS



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DEFINITIONS

Colonialism is a *policy of control over people and places*, usually for economic dominance (extracting wealth). We focus on European colonialism beginning in the 16th century, which is underpinned by coloniality.

Coloniality is a concept where *systems of racialised hierarchies, dominance of Eurocentric knowledge and cultural systems are normalised* and make (neo-)colonialism seem inevitable.

WHY CHALLENGE COLONIALITY?

- As knowledge producers, we hold **power**
- Our identities influence how we see and understand the world (i.e. **ontology**) and perceive knowledge (i.e. **epistemology**). Also affects the access, opportunities, and privileges that we gain (i.e. **positionality**)

WHY CHALLENGE COLONIALITY?

- In research settings, this affects the:
 - Research questions/ideas we think are worth pursuing,
 - Methodology/research paradigm we employ,
 - Methods we choose to use,
 - Data we decide to collect,
 - Way we analyse the data and frame issues, and
 - Outputs we produce (i.e. for whom)

Focus is not on individuals, but on *research process and system*

COLONIAL HISTORY OF RESEARCH

- Universities created *justifications for colonialism*, particularly through developing theories of racial hierarchies.
- Research provided *tools enabling colonialism*, through exploration and mapping, botanical research, etc. For example, even health research was spoken of as helping to further British colonisation.

“In the coming century, the success of imperialism will depend largely upon success with the microscope”

- Sir Ronald Ross, British doctor born in India, received Noble Prize for Medicine in 1902 for his work on malaria transmission

COLONIAL HISTORY OF RESEARCH

- Many (historical) universities were/are *funded by the plunders of colonisation*, including through the exploitation of people and ecologies in monocultural agro-industries (e.g. sugar cane plantations and soy bean plantations)
- Vast museum collections of specimens and artefacts were also acquired through colonisation.
- These form much of the basis for why these universities lead in rankings.

PRESENT COLONIAL LEGACIES

- *Research access*
Dominantly white/Global North countries and males have easier and better access to resources, fieldwork in other countries, and opportunities to attend conferences.
- *Research agenda and funding*
Wealth amassed from colonialism enable Global North researchers to do more research and decide what kinds of research to pursue.

PRESENT COLONIAL LEGACIES

- *Research approach/methods*

Local research “collaborators” not able to design, analyse, or contribute substantially – termed ‘parachute science’ – perpetuating colonial dynamics of power imbalances.

- *Research output*

Publications dominated by Global North researchers; lack of funding poses difficulties in publishing or accessing publications in Global South. Dominance of English language in research also creates additional barriers for non-English speakers, preventing recognition of intellectual contribution.

HOW CAN WE BEGIN?

- Reflect on your **positionality** & how that has affected your research
- Consider what your **research philosophy** is, why you are doing research, how your research is used?
- **Respect & make space** (i.e. listen) for non-dominant perspectives
- Be informed of the **historical context, cultural practices, and knowledges of the peoples** in the places you work
- Develop **equitable** relationships
- Consider **co-designing** research questions with those where you work, making the research useful for them (co-production of knowledge)
- **Acknowledge** field assistants, technicians, translators or anyone who has helped, offering co-authorship in publications when they contribute substantially

QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON

- What is the **history of your discipline**, are there critiques to be aware especially from other disciplines using critical theory (e.g. political ecology or science and technology studies)
- Are the methodologies, theories, or underlying logics that you apply structured by **imperialism/colonialism**?
- Is your research output **only useful for the Global North**?
- Are there **other questions** to be asked, other ways of knowing? Local knowledge, ontologies, cosmologies to be respected?
- How are your **research questions** generated; is there input from communities who will be impacted by your research?

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