



HOW (& WHY) TO DO DECOLONIAL RESEARCH

A Guide to Epistemic Disobedience and Methodological Liberation

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define decoloniality and its relevance in global health and medical education research
- Identify the epistemic and ontological assumptions embedded in colonial research paradigms
- Understand key concepts such as epistemic disobedience, reflexivity, and positionality
- Apply a decolonial lens to your own research practices



Sections

1. The Case for Decolonial Research
2. Foundational concepts
3. Methodological shifts
4. Deep reflexivity
5. Ethical and practical considerations

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THE CASE FOR DECOLONIAL RESEARCH

- Colonial legacies persist in research epistemologies and methodologies
- Global health and medical education are shaped by Euro-American hegemonies
- The need for ethical, context-responsive, and equitable knowledge production

Naidu (2024); Naidu
(2021)



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THE CASE FOR DECOLONIAL RESEARCH

- Colonialism as a system of knowledge control
- Research as a colonial tool
- Postcolonial Continuities: The Coloniality of Power and Knowledge
- Resistance and Epistemic Disobedience

Naidu (2024); Naidu
(2021)



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WHAT IS DECOLONIAL RESEARCH?

Definition: A paradigm that seeks to delink from Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies and colonial logics.

Goals: Knowledge sovereignty, epistemic justice, equity.

Core concepts: Epistemic disobedience, pluriversality, border thinking.

Naidu (2024); Naidu (2021)



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Foundational Concepts



COLONIALITY

Enduring patterns of power post-colonialism

EPISTEMIC DISOBEDIENCE

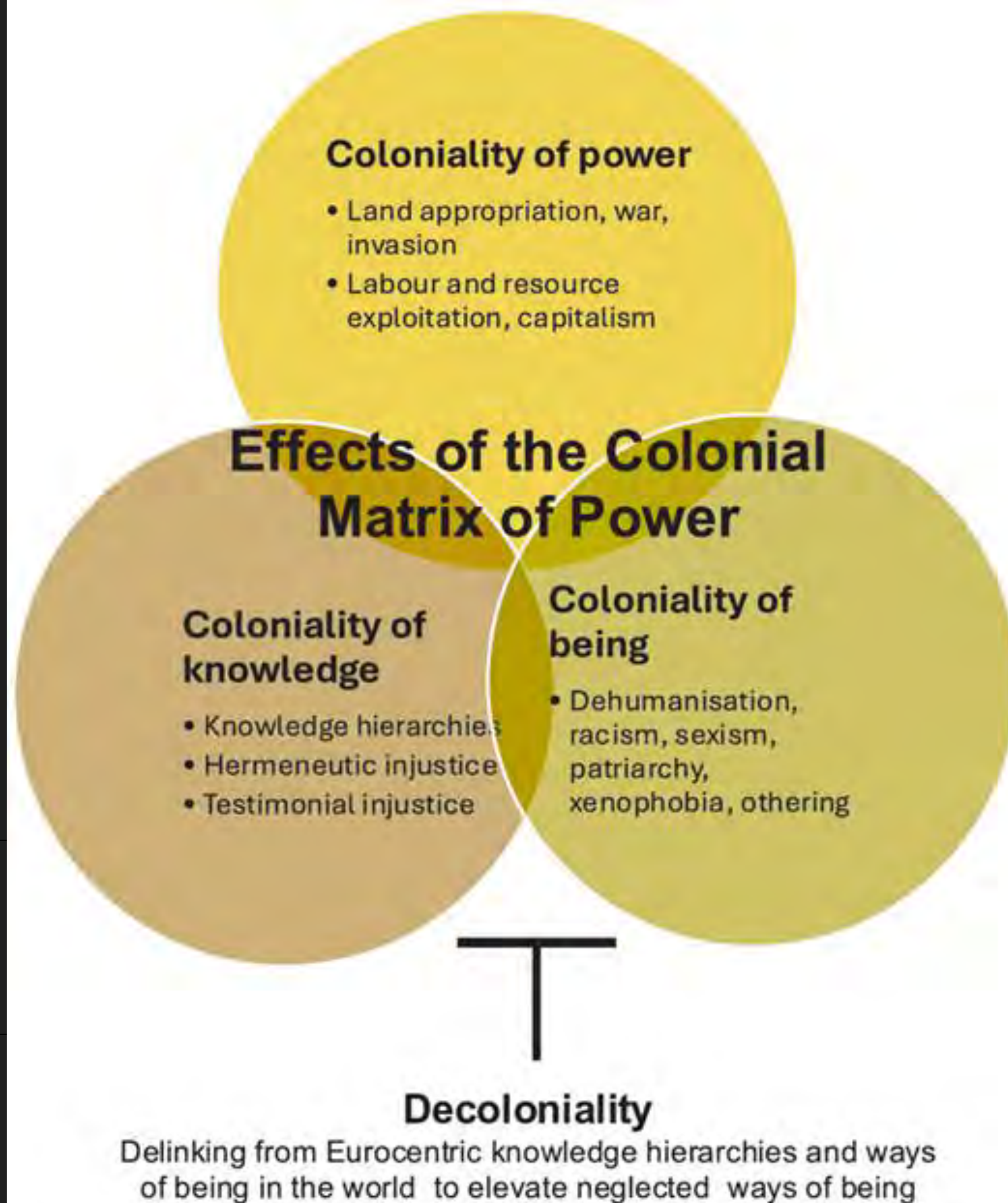
Epistemic disobedience: Rejecting dominant Eurocentric epistemologies (Mignolo, in Naidu 2024)

METHODOLOGICAL DECOLONISATION

Transforming how we generate knowledge

SITUATED KNOWLEDGES

PLURIVERSALITY



Sims DA, Naidu T. How to ... do decolonial research. Clin Teach. 2024; 21(6):e13806. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tct.13806>

COLONIALITY IN RESEARCH

Colonial Era Practices	Coloniality Today
Research to govern, control	Research to maintain academic hierarchies
Erasure of Indigenous knowledge	Marginalization in publishing, funding
Extractive data collection	Tokenism, parachute research
Pseudoscientific racial hierarchies	Western dominance in what counts as evidence

UNDOING COLONIALITY IN RESEARCH

Concept	What It Challenges	What It Encourages
Decolonising Research	Hidden continuities of colonial power	Structural critique of research systems
Epistemic Disobedience	Epistemic supremacy of the West	Ethical rebellion and local epistemologies
Pluriversality	Singular worldview (monoculture)	Recognition of multiple valid knowledges

Principles of Decolonial Research

- Epistemic humility
 - Reflexivity and
positionality
 - Knowledge co-production
 - Accountability to
communities
 - Ethical relationality
- Sims & Naidu (2024)

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Methodological Shifts



1. Research Questions
2. Research Design
3. Data Analysis
4. Ethics
5. Power

SHIFTING TO DECOLONIAL RESEARCH METHODS

Aspect	Traditional Research	Decolonial Research
Questions	Researcher-driven, deficit-based	Community-driven, context-sensitive
Design	Extractive, universalist	Relational, co-designed, place-based
Analysis	Detached, codified	Dialogic, interpretive, epistemically plural
Ethics	IRB-focused	Community-accountable, culturally embedded
Power	Researcher as expert	Knowledge co-production, shared authority

Doing Decolonial Research

1. Commit to Epistemic Justice
2. Situate Knowledge in Place
3. Reorient Research as relational
4. Be Reflexive and Accountable
5. Disrupt Colonial Logics

PRINCIPLES OF DECOLONIAL RESEARCH



Deep reflexivity

Decolonial reflexivity framework that expands traditional understandings of reflexivity in global health research by incorporating individual, structural, and relational dimensions. This framework helps researchers critically examine their positionality and the colonial power relations embedded in knowledge production.



INDIVIDUAL REFLEXIVITY

Focus: The researcher's personal identity, experiences, and epistemological assumptions

STRUCTURAL REFLEXIVITY

Focus: The systems and institutions that shape the conditions of research

RELATIONAL REFLEXIVITY

Focus: The relationships between researchers, participants, communities, and co-producers of knowledge

DECOLONIAL REFLEXIVITY FRAMEWORK

Domain	Focus	Reflexive Action
Individual	Self-awareness	Question personal biases and motivations
Structural	Institutional power	Interrogate systems that privilege some knowledges over others
Relational	Human relationships	Foster equitable, reciprocal partnerships

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Ethical & Practical considerations



1. Epistemic Disobedience in Practice
2. Reflexivity and Positionality
3. Decolonise Dissemination and Authorship



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How does
coloniality show
up in your field?

What would epistemic
disobedience look like in
your work?

How might your research
become a site of justice
rather than extraction?



THANK YOU

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