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1 *Chapter 2 - Decolonising Knowledge – Start at the Beginning*

2 *Professor Adeela ahmed Shafi*

3

4

5

6 *Abstract*

7 This chapter interrogates the colonial underpinnings of knowledge generation, with particular
8 attention to the entrenched inequities within higher education institutions. It highlights how
9 Western Eurocentric paradigms dominate academic discourse, sidelining contributions from the
10 global South and other historically marginalised regions. This dominance is reflected in
11 curricula, research methodologies, and structural powers inherent in research funding and
12 publication, which fail to accommodate diverse epistemologies.

13

14 The chapter examines three interconnected areas: decolonising knowledge to confront
15 epistemic injustices, decolonising research methodologies to embrace culturally situated and
16 contextually appropriate approaches, and addressing structural power within colonial
17 hierarchies in research funding and publication systems. These issues are deeply rooted in
18 structural inequalities that privilege scholars and institutions from the global North,
19 perpetuating hegemonic perspectives and marginalising alternative knowledges.

20

21 By drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives, the chapter calls on universities to critically
22 reflect on their roles as custodians of knowledge. It advocates for a reorientation of curricula,
23 the adoption of inclusive research practices, and the dismantling of systemic biases in funding
24 and publishing processes. Higher education institutions are positioned as key agents in
25 fostering epistemic equity and amplifying the voices of diverse communities. This chapter
26 argues that such transformative efforts are essential to challenge entrenched hierarchies and
27 create a more inclusive and pluralistic academic landscape.

28

29

30 *Introduction*

31 *This chapter is focused on the decolonising of knowledge generation itself. Part of the problem of*
32 *decolonising, even if that involves reading lists alone, is that not all subjects necessarily have*
33 *availability of, or access to, published works from across the world (Schucan Bird & Pitman, 2020).*

34 *This is a result of unequal access to opportunities for getting work published and unequal access to*

35 research funding, which means there is a comparable dearth in research from, for example, the
36 (so-called) global South. Most theorists whose works are described as seminal in many disciplines
37 are white (Peters, 2015) and most often from the (so-called) global North. Teaching within those
38 disciplines refers to those theorists irrespective of where in the world the educational
39 establishment is – and often positioned above any local or regional contributors to that discipline
40 (Williams & Chrisman, 1994).

41
42 That is not to say that seminal works conducted in the global North should not be taught or
43 included in teaching in other countries. The problem occurs with the privileging and exclusive
44 teaching of just that knowledge/theory/approach as if it is the optimal knowing in that discipline,
45 to the exclusion of all other knowledges. To take the example of attachment theories in
46 psychology: Jean Piaget(1896-1980) from France, whose theory of cognitive development and
47 contribution to education theories of learning, is positioned as seminal, positing that all cultures
48 and people learn and develop in the same way. Similarly, John Bowlby's (1907-1990) contribution
49 from Britain to attachment theories in child development and psychology is taught across the
50 world. To take John Dewey (1859-1952), an American philosopher and educationalist, is also
51 positioned as an authority in the field and taught across the world. Challenge any discipline for
52 their seminal works, and it will not take long to identify a pattern in the geographical region of
53 origin, the gender, and their (white) ethnicity. What this means, epistemologically, is that
54 knowledge is skewed because it is generated through the lens of the generator (Mitova, 2020).
55 Whilst some of this discussion will depend on one's ontological positioning, there is no escaping
56 that even a die-hard positivist would acknowledge that any reality is negotiated through the
57 researcher. Even if you are a scientist in a lab researching microbiology, the choice of the research
58 question has come from the researcher or whoever wrote the research programme, or the panel
59 that approved the funding and what they considered important to study.

60
61 This problem, as considered in this chapter, therefore refers to understanding more about how the
62 knowledge generation process is colonial in nature (Sule, 2024). This chapter will explore three
63 elements: first, the issue of decolonising knowledge or epistemic questions and epistemic injustice.
64 Second, the decolonisation of research methodologies for more rigorous and valid research is a
65 quest all researchers have. Third, this chapter will focus on decolonising research funding and
66 dismantling colonial power structures that drive research priorities and publication.

67

68 *The Epistemic question - decolonising knowledge*

69 *Knowledge and power are inextricably linked, and knowledge is never neutral (Jansen, 2019).*

70 *Jansen (2019) argues that to dismantle the colonial constraints of knowledge itself, there is a need*
71 *to understand the nuances of the power relations inherent in knowledge production and how these*
72 *interact over time and place. For previously colonised places, the notion of decolonising knowledge*
73 *is different to that in coloniser or non-colonised nations, where the debates and rationale are not*
74 *the same.*

75

76 *Mitova (2020) presents two broad rationales for decolonising knowledge, which include*
77 *decolonising for epistemic reasons (e.g. Wiredu, 2002) or for moral imperatives (e.g. Chimakonam,*
78 *2017). This chapter asserts that these rationales combined are the rationale for decolonising*
79 *knowledge. However, the extent of significance for each rationale may well depend on different*
80 *contextual factors (historical, political, colonised/coloniser). Then there is what Mitova (2020)*
81 *called decolonising from-within (the global North) and the from-without, which refers to*
82 *decolonising from the perspective of the marginalised knower (or the global South). This chapter*
83 *focuses on decolonising knowledge from-within a Western higher education context. Before*
84 *moving on to that discussion, it is important to consider terminology. The terms ‘Western’,*
85 *‘European’, and ‘Global North’ are often used interchangeably, particularly when discussing*
86 *economic or political power dynamics. However, they are different because ‘Western’ often refers*
87 *to countries in the West, including North America, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand,*
88 *where the emphasis is on shared values and cultural influences. ‘European’ refers to countries in*
89 *Europe, a geographical region with a diverse history and culture. The Global North is a broader*
90 *term encompassing regions with, for example, developed economies, higher standards of living,*
91 *and significant global influence and includes North America, Europe, and parts of East Asia*
92 *(Muller, 2018). However, these definitions do not necessarily distinguish between the colonised,*
93 *coloniser or non-colonised nations. For that reason, the terms Western, European or global North*
94 *are used interchangeably as appropriate to the point being made.*

95

96 *When decolonising from-within the need to decolonise may be positioned for epistemic reasons.*
97 *This is because the domination of one system of knowledge is at the expense of other knowledges,*
98 *and consequently creates an epistemic hierarchy which is at odds with, for example, modern*
99 *Britain in its claims for a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive society (Arday et al., 2021).*

100 *However, it is also related to the moral rationale because residing within those hierarchies are*
101 *inequalities, privileging some groups (e.g. white students) over others in terms of outcomes, such as*
102 *the degree awarding gaps (Arday et al., 2021) with wider employment and housing implications*

103 *for black students. These negative outcomes are well-documented and evidenced across a*
104 *multitude of measures and over time (Whitcomb et al., 2021), reflecting the entrenched nature of*
105 *the inequalities.*

106
107 *This is what Fricker (2007) called epistemic injustice coming about from centuries of ‘epistemicide’*
108 *(Grosfoguel, 2013) where knowledge is claimed as Western, despite having originated from, e.g.*
109 *the Arabs (Muslim), the indigenous populations of the Americas, the African nations and Indian*
110 *subcontinent. Mitova (2020) talks of epistemic oppression where the legacy of colonisation is*
111 *embodied in the systems and structures set up during colonial times in those regions, and which*
112 *remain. This coloniality continues to be perpetuated through knowledge production by, for*
113 *example, the domination of global North journals in European languages as the more credible sites*
114 *of publication (Mungra and Webber, 2010). This resulted in a hierarchy of knowledge production,*
115 *deprioritising knowledge generated by those whose heritages, cultures and histories hail from*
116 *different geographical parts of the world (Mitova, 2020).*

117
118 *Mitova (2020) goes on to discuss how there are a spectrum of perspectives ranging from the*
119 *moderate approach, which advocates for a diversification of knowledge and thought from different*
120 *perspectives and contexts, to the outright rejection of all Western thought – this is perhaps less the*
121 *case in Western decolonising efforts. This chapter looks to explore what decolonising knowledge*
122 *looks like in Western contexts, though there is an extant body of knowledge on decolonising within*
123 *previously colonised nations (e.g. Wiredu, 2002) where decolonising focuses on ‘epistemic re-*
124 *centering’. This enables people ‘to reclaim the right to think and theorise from one’s own*
125 *geographic and socio-cultural location, and to choose for oneself the focus of one’s epistemic*
126 *endeavours in accordance with one’s own conceptual schemas, social identities, and attendant*
127 *interests’ (Mitova, 2020 p. 194).*

128
129 *Although Mitova (2020) quote refers to previously colonised (African) contexts, this could still be*
130 *applied to diverse Western contexts where students and learners from wide range of backgrounds*
131 *and heritages should have the right to bring their own unique identities, histories and knowledges*
132 *to any learning situation to enhance theirs and others learning. Thus, we would advocate*
133 *extending the right to re-think from one’s geographic socio-cultural location to also include one’s*
134 *socio-cultural heritage. This is relevant to racially and other minoritised communities in Britain*
135 *(and other Western nations) who often have this additional layer to their identity, even if they are*
136 *UK domiciled and are third, fourth or fifth generation descendants.*

137

138 However, such approaches need to be underpinned by the custodians of 'Western knowledge' in the
139 global North (e.g. universities, funders, publishers) to acknowledge the contributions made by
140 other cultures and places and re-orientate themselves from perceiving and claiming it as
141 originating from the West. An example of this is the number of inventions and discoveries made by,
142 e.g. Islamic scholars in a number of disciplines, such as astronomy, physics, biology, architecture,
143 technology, which are not given due credit (Grosfoguel, 2013). Even the notion of, for example,
144 Christopher Columbus 'discovering' far-off lands is a colonial position. If (Indigenous) people are
145 already there, then it has already been discovered! These places already have their own knowledge
146 bases from which the Western world did learn, as well as vice versa. Therefore, the first aspect for
147 decolonising knowledge is for the global North to acknowledge and reference where knowledge,
148 discoveries, and inventions have been made, particularly when they originate from previously
149 colonised places. This has to then come through an overhaul of the broader power structures
150 inherent in university curricula, published research, and funding criteria.

151
152 Even in previously colonised places, e.g. Africa or India, the positioning of Eurocentric Western
153 knowledge is still privileged, where local or regional knowledge is benchmarked against it. Then
154 there are the other countries that have not been colonised, for example, Thailand, who also
155 privilege Western knowledge, what does decolonising look like there (Moncrieffe et al., 2020)? The
156 point is that there needs to be a radical re-shift globally, which repositions and flattens the
157 knowledge hierarchy where knowledges from across the world contribute to an overall body of
158 knowledge which we can all draw upon to better understand our world and help solve the big
159 problems we face as a human existence. However, for that we need to dig deeper into the nature of
160 knowledge generation and that takes us to research methodologies and indeed research funding
161 itself.

162

163 *Changing Lens/es: decolonising research methodologies*

164 Keikelame & Swartz (2019) describe decolonising research methodology as "an approach that is
165 used to challenge Eurocentric research methods that undermine local knowledge and experiences
166 of marginalised groups" (p.1). The purpose and debate in decolonising research methodologies
167 has taken a similar approach to the epistemic question. That is, whether decolonised
168 methodologies should reject and replace existing (Western-centric) methodologies or whether to
169 add a range of additional decolonised methodologies to the existing approaches. The early and
170 seminal works of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) on decolonising research methodologies brought to
171 the fore innovative and creative research methods such as autoethnography, visual methods,
172 storytelling, and other participatory approaches allowing for the voices and needs of indigenous

173 populations to be fore fronted when, for example, designing (health) services for them (Keikelame
174 & Swartz, 2019). Zavala (2013) argues that decolonising research methodologies is also about
175 developing researcher identities during the research process. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Chilisa
176 (2019) also emphasise the need for researchers to use an (indigenous) lens through the whole
177 research process from the choice of theoretical frameworks and methodologies to how research
178 findings are interpreted and translated into actions that promote social justice. These works are
179 largely focused on regions where Indigenous populations have been marginalised, however, this
180 approach is still applicable to (racially) marginalised communities in Britain and other Western
181 contexts whose experiences are not too different.

182
183 Barnes (2018) discusses how decolonising methodologies not only brought together indigenous,
184 transformative, liberation, feminist, and critical methodologies. And how they have contributed to
185 strengthening decolonising research and positioning them alongside the paradigm debates or
186 ways in which people view the world (ontology) and the nature of knowing (epistemology).
187 This epistemological view of decolonising methodologies as a paradigm gives credibility and an
188 appreciation of the impact of the ontological, epistemological, axiological, positionality, reflexivity
189 and ethical significance in decolonising research methodology. Nevertheless, Barnes (2018) did
190 question whether such a positioning has the same impact as it should, particularly as the
191 epistemological stances have extended from, for example, four paradigms in Denzin & Lincoln
192 (1994) to over 20 pages worth of paradigms in 2011. Barnes nevertheless claims this to be a
193 natural outcome of having diverse methodologies.

194
195 Barnes (2018) also challenged the notion of decolonising methodologies in that if not done
196 correctly, these approaches can end up perpetuating the very systems they seek to dismantle. In
197 particular, Barnes (2018) warns against assuming that decolonisation methodologies, just by
198 virtue of being decolonising methodologies, automatically contribute to decolonising. Rather,
199 these methodologies should be open to criticism in the same way as any other methodology in
200 terms of their decolonising potential. This has to include extending ethical considerations to
201 ensure that research is culturally appropriate as one of the ways in which to decolonise research
202 methods. It involves the researcher ensuring that critical reflection on ensuring their research is
203 ethically and culturally sound (Barnes, 2018). Sabati (2019) goes on to emphasise that higher
204 education ethics committees have a responsibility towards an anti-colonial approach and should
205 do this by integrating cultural appropriateness into their ethics criteria to ensure that an anti-
206 colonial lens is applied during the research planning process. Dei (2019) discusses decolonising
207 and anti-coloniality, arguing that both are intertwined. He argues that political and discursive
208 practices must be anti-colonial in nature and that anti-coloniality is the pathway to a decolonised

209 *future. In this way, researchers and higher education institutions need to take a deliberate anti-*
210 *colonial approach where decolonisation, which Dei (2019) emphasises as an action-oriented word,*
211 *is the means to arrive at a decolonised world.*

212
213 *For the researcher who wants to take a decolonised approach, they can approach this in a number*
214 *of ways, these include using decolonised methodologies, data collection methods and ethical*
215 *approaches, all of which are outlined earlier in this section. These can all contribute towards*
216 *decolonising the way we do research. But if a researcher decides not to work within the*
217 *framework of a specified decolonised methodology, does that mean they are not able to decolonise*
218 *their research? This chapter would argue otherwise. Much of the discussions thus far point to how*
219 *taking an anti-colonial, decolonising approach to research methodology is about research findings*
220 *being credible, rigorous and trustworthy. This is not new to research methodology and actually*
221 *refers to the validity of research findings and the associated claims.*

222
223 *Validity may be defined differently depending on the paradigm of the researcher; however, in*
224 *general terms, validity refers to how accurate or credible research findings and conclusions are in*
225 *terms of the overall aims of the research, the participants, and those for whom the research was*
226 *intended (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Thus, to ensure validity, it is imperative that the data generated*
227 *is that which was intended to be collected by the researcher and reflects what was intended by the*
228 *participant. To that end, if a researcher is unaware of their entrenched colonial biases or*
229 *assumptions, then they would not be able to interrogate and analyse the data that would reflect*
230 *those intentions. In this way, decolonising research can be likened to ensuring the validity of*
231 *research, which places decolonising at the heart of research design. Sabati (2019) argues for*
232 *universities and other research ethics committees to ensure cultural relevance and appropriateness*
233 *as part of the ethical elements of research; a decolonial lens should be applied in the same way*
234 *when working to ensure the validity of one's research design.*

235
236 *Further, quantitative research methods should not be exempt from this and should be subject to*
237 *the same level of rigour in terms of their decolonising responsibility. This is particularly because of*
238 *misuse by researchers in the past, and where quantitative research was (rightly) accused of being*
239 *inherently oppressive (Cokley & Awad, 2013). However, this emphasizes the need for competency*
240 *in researchers, and ideally, more efforts should be made to have researchers from a range of*
241 *backgrounds when devising the quantitative instruments. This can contribute to ensuring data*
242 *collection instruments are anti-colonial and phrased, for example, survey items in a way that*
243 *challenges coloniality and other assumptions and biases. This requires additional expertise and*
244 *effort from researchers and should be part of the reviewer process when assessing research*

245 applications for funding or publication. Such approaches would put decolonising research at the
246 heart of research design, irrespective of which epistemological stance the research takes, thereby
247 pushing all research to contribute to decolonising, not just those that explicitly use decolonising
248 methodologies. The issue of research funding and publishing is also an important site for
249 decolonising research, and we turn our attention to that next.

250

251 *Structural Powers: decolonising research funding and publication*

252

253 Research funding and publication are key structural enablers and facilitators of research and its
254 impact (Olusanya et al., 2021). However, as this chapter has thus far discussed, the structural
255 factors are exactly where much of the colonial mechanisms are at play. Decisions about which
256 research is funded are critical and have a key role in decolonising research. This is because funders
257 have a powerful role in allocating research money, which produces findings to be worked into
258 published academic papers and books. Most of the major research funders and publishers are
259 based in the global North, which intentionally or unintentionally privileges applicants and authors
260 from those places (Istratii & Lewis, 2019). It is therefore not surprising that funding bodies report
261 lower applications from researchers in the global South, which results in more research emanating
262 from the global North. The findings may or may not be suitable or relevant to countries in the
263 global South, thereby perpetuating the hegemonic views from the global North (Khan, 2022).
264 Besson (2022) discusses three key steps in how research funders can decolonise their processes. A
265 first step is how calls for proposals need to be reconsidered for how they position a 'hegemonic'
266 view of quality research being, for example, conducted multi-site or generalisable. However, this
267 can exclude researchers from the global South who may have other research priorities and
268 problems which need addressing with a much more local and contextual focus. The second step
269 that Besson (2022) highlights is how proposals are assessed and reviewed, emphasising how pose
270 and gaze are reflected in the review criteria, disadvantaging applicants outside the global North.
271 Approaches to research that do not fit the 'established' Eurocentric ways are often assessed as of
272 lower quality or not transferable and therefore not as fundable. Challenging reviewer criteria with
273 a decolonising lens would be needed to change this. The third step refers to deep reflection on the
274 review process and its structures, particularly how it disadvantages applicants from the global
275 South. For example, applicants who are not used to receiving large grants will have less experience
276 managing them. What support funders can offer here is something they could consider rather than
277 rejecting a proposal on this type of criterion. In this way, Besson (2022) makes clear that research
278 funders must challenge and critique their own (colonial) processes and structures rather than

279 *assume that applicants from the global South are either less in number, lower in quality, or lacking*
280 *in experience, and that is why they do not receive funding..*

281

282 *Just as research funders must challenge and critique their role in the research process, so must*
283 *universities challenge how they use the outputs of research, i.e. research publications in the form of*
284 *books and journal articles. One way institutions in the Western context have done this is to*
285 *decolonise and diversify their reading lists, but this can be seen as a simple and superficial*
286 *approach (Bhanot & Shukla, 2015). However, it is not as superficial as some might claim. This is*
287 *because, in order to decolonise reading lists to include a range of theorists and publications from*
288 *different perspectives, there must be a diverse range of readings to choose from. The problem,*
289 *however, stems from the fact that research funding and the subsequent publication of findings are*
290 *largely based in and controlled by the Global North (Collyer, 2018), as previously noted. The global*
291 *North are the ones that decide which research is worthy of funding (Besson, 2022). Even if*
292 *researchers from the global South get research grants which yield papers to publish, these are then*
293 *often put to Eurocentric or Western-led journals for publication, with reviewers largely from the*
294 *global North (Khan, 2022), with similar review criteria. This inherently places the researcher from*
295 *the global South at a double disadvantage: at the funding level and then the publication level.*
296 *Therefore, decolonising reading lists is an important way to decolonise knowledge as it can start*
297 *off a deeper chain of events with regard to research and publishing. Unless there is a deep and*
298 *growing demand for research and publications from the global South, there is less of a chance of*
299 *publication in journals beyond their own contexts.*

300

301 *Collyer (2018) demonstrated in her study that mechanisms associated with publishing allow and*
302 *sustain knowledge produced in the global South to be 'systematically marginalised, dismissed,*
303 *under-valued, or simply not made accessible to other researchers' (p.X). She, however,*
304 *problematizes the development of what she calls transnational or transregional circuits of*
305 *publication, which have developed to address the marginalisation of knowledge from the global*
306 *South. This is because, although such regional circuits allow for greater visibility and publication*
307 *opportunities, they also perpetuate the division of knowledge and allow for the global North to*
308 *continue to 'other' knowledge that is from those global South circuits. In this way, a two-tier*
309 *system is developed, which is not conducive to decolonising at all.*

310

311 *Khan (2022) points out that publication houses and journals act as gatekeepers for what is*
312 *considered high quality but this is judged through Eurocentric or a Western lens (Weldon, 2008)*
313 *and anything that does not fit the 'norm' as they judge, is not considered high-quality enough and*
314 *less likely to be published. This is perhaps one of the main reasons that research from the global*

315 *South is either not published by journals and publishers in the global North, thereby contributing*
316 *to authors from the global South to focus on 'circuits' based in the global South. Further, authors*
317 *from the global North rarely choose to publish in journals from the global South, which indicates*
318 *what Collyer (2018) calls intraversion, whereby authors/researchers and publishers from the*
319 *global North only look inwards to themselves. Indeed, authors from the global North do not make*
320 *reference to their geographical location, assuming a (geographical and hierarchical) universality*
321 *to the claims, whereas authors publishing from the global South will always (be required to) make*
322 *reference to their geographical location (Connell et al., 2017).*

323
324 *Furthermore, decolonising structural powers in publishing includes language. Most of the*
325 *'international' journals, which are usually from the global North, are in English – and that too a*
326 *'standardised' 'American' English (Fiormonte & Priego, 2023). This immediately positions one*
327 *form of a language as prioritised or positioned as the 'global' language. Authors for whom English*
328 *is an additional language are more likely to be 'rejected' for their use of the English language and*
329 *the content of their writing (Mungra & Webber, 2010). Whilst many would argue (and fairly*
330 *perhaps) that English is the most spoken and understood language in the world and therefore*
331 *provides wider access to research from across the world, the use of English/es should be broadened*
332 *out to include not just American or British English but a recognition that English has many*
333 *versions and, actually exposure of these many versions is a form of decolonising. Therefore, it*
334 *should be business as usual for readers of research to become accustomed to different forms of*
335 *writing because how work is presented linguistically carries within it some understanding of the*
336 *context and therefore an opportunity for further learning. Forcing authors to 're-write' their work*
337 *to fit American English is a blatant form of perpetuating inequalities and hierarchies of language*
338 *(Aker & Iyengar, 2024). Decolonising publishing should consider this as an important change that*
339 *can open up access for authors but also give readers greater opportunity and insight into different*
340 *and authentic ways in which people express their work.*

341
342 *Looking forwards*

343 *Decolonising knowledge requires universities and higher education institutions to critically reflect*
344 *on the colonial legacies embedded within their structures, practices, and curricula. This chapter*
345 *has highlighted how these institutions continue to privilege Eurocentric perspectives, perpetuating*
346 *systemic inequities in knowledge production, research methodologies, and resource access. These*
347 *entrenched hierarchies marginalise diverse epistemologies and limit the inclusivity that higher*
348 *education aspires to achieve.*

349

350 *This does not necessarily equate to rejecting Western or Eurocentric paradigms, but certainly is*
351 *about disrupting the dominance and fostering an academic environment where diverse*
352 *knowledges are valued equally. Higher education institutions must actively integrate contributions*
353 *from historically marginalised regions and communities, ensuring their rightful place in the global*
354 *body of knowledge. This requires an overhaul of curricula, a reassessment of research*
355 *methodologies, and for universities and funding bodies to play their part in transforming the*
356 *structural barriers in research and publishing. Powerful research bodies and publications*
357 *monopolies must interrogate their own processes, from grant allocation to journal reviews, to*
358 *address biases that disadvantage scholars from the global South. Decolonising these structures is*
359 *essential if decolonising is to be a reality.*

360
361 *Universities and higher education institutions must lead the way in embodying these principles in*
362 *their teaching, research, and institutional policies. Demanding or searching for research and*
363 *theory from different voices and perspectives means we can all play our part in decolonising*
364 *research.*

365

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