




Decolonising research practices and norms in higher education: Why is it important and what are current approaches?

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Understanding decolonisation/decoloniality



Decolonisation can be understood differently depending on how one relates to histories of colonialism, as well as one's geographical, political and socio-cultural locus.



Decolonisation may refer to the territorial and political decolonisation that occurred in former colonies (e.g. Haitian revolution in 1789, independence movements post-1945) but it may also refer to epistemological, cultural or cognitive emancipation/liberation after territorial decolonisation has occurred.

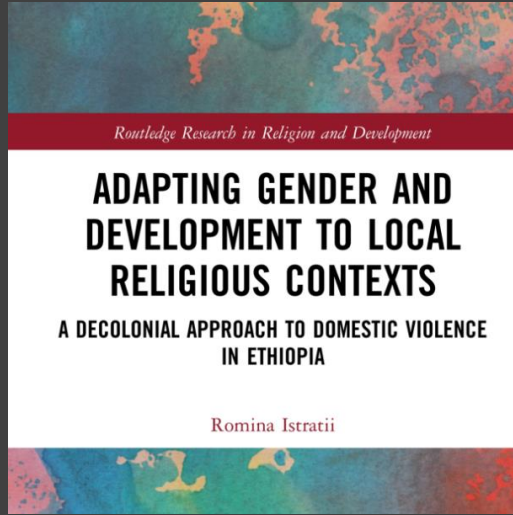


Decoloniality emerged in Latin America as a critique of on-going colonialism (the colonality of power) through the dominant knowledge system, imperialism and globalisation.

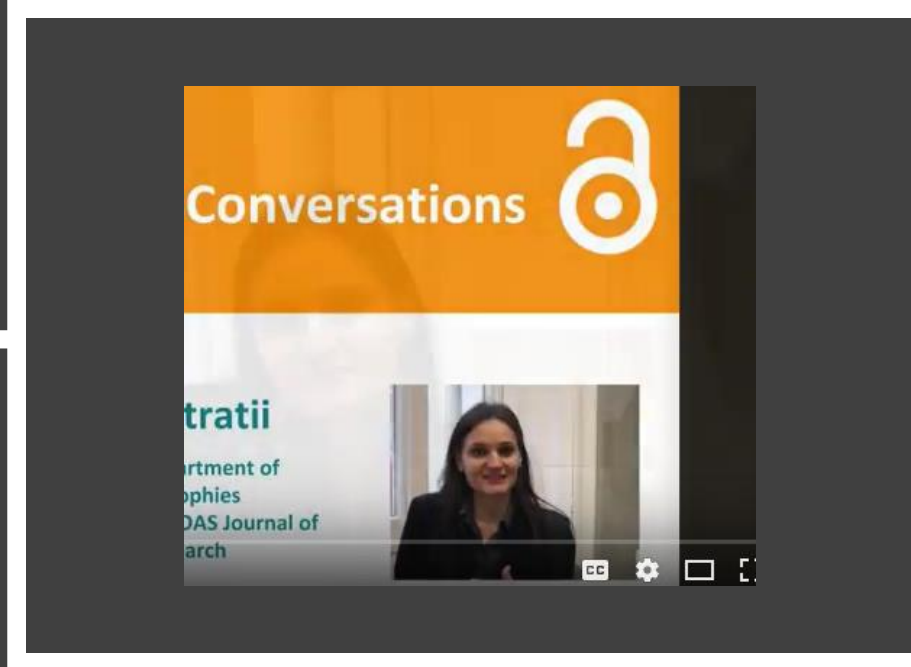



my positionality and work





Decolonial Subversions



 **SOAS**
University of London

Applying a Decolonial Lens
to Research Structures,
Norms and Practices in Higher
Education Institutions

Conversation Event Report
SOAS University of London,
18th September 2019

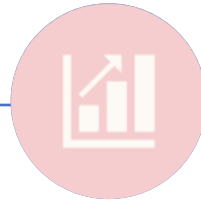


An unequal world system



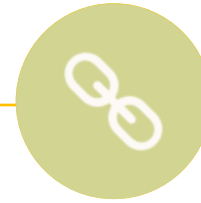
EPISTEMOLOGY

- Western epistemology has dominated, and this has been embedded in colonial legacies, Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment concepts and theories
- Western standards have dictated what matters as valid knowledge
- Non-western researchers, academics and publics have not eschewed this epistemological order



IDEOLOGY

- Ideological and political dominance of Northern countries and organisations
- Northern agendas dominate the fields of development, public health, humanitarian responses and the international VAWG and GBV response sector (e.g., Agenda 2030, SDGs)
- Regional/local bodies have often espoused them as 'global agendas'



STRUCTURE

- Material inequalities with most funding being based in the so-called Global North or 'norths' within the Global South
- Western funders and donors dictating their own standards of practice & performance (results-based, quantitative metrics, conditions-based aid)
- Fewer Southern funding bodies and donors to promote regional/local priorities

Epistemological inequalities

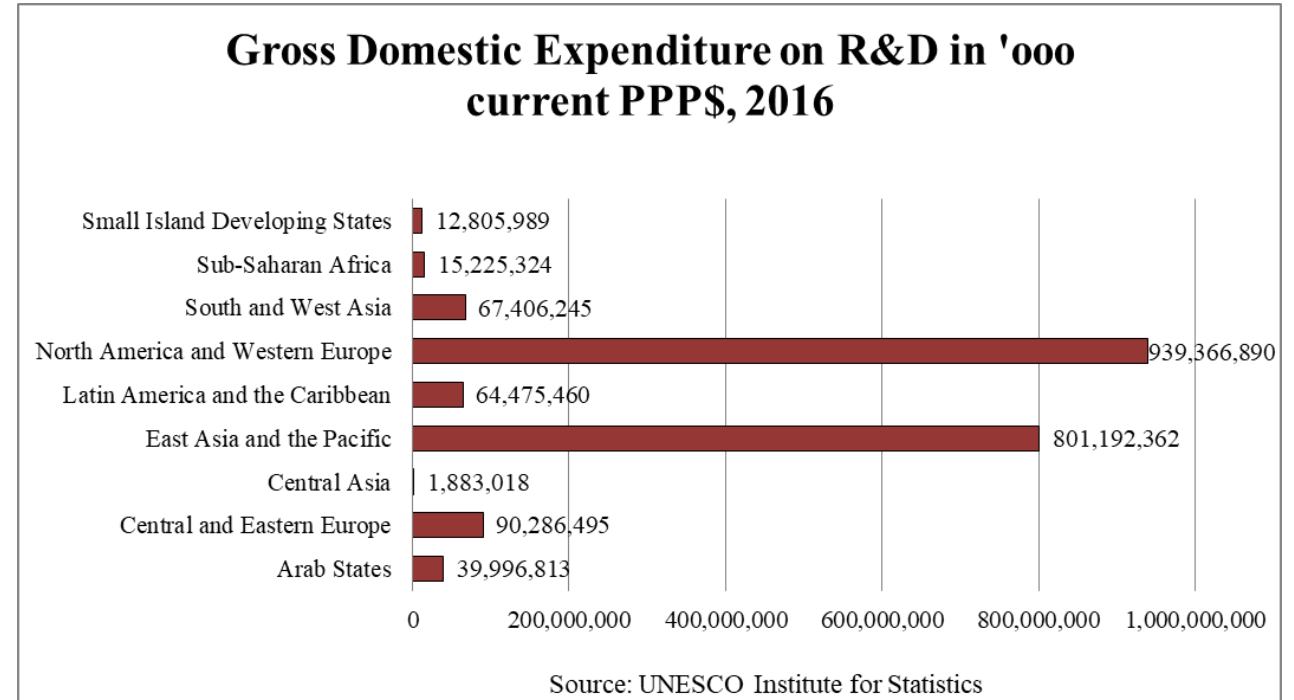
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- As African American pedagogist Gloria Ladson-Billings has noted, “[e]pistemology is ultimately linked to worldview” (2005, 258). We are always “epistemologically situated,” which means that our personal worldviews influence our conceptual, theoretical and analytical frameworks as researchers.
 - Historically, Western Europeans projected their worldviews, interests and understandings of humanity onto the “other” whether through colonialism or projections and assumptions propagated through historical narratives and scientific paradigms (Fanon 1961; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986; Ρωμανίδης 1975; Todorova 2009; Quijano 2000; Tuhiwai-Smith 1999; Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Istratii 2020).
 - In contemporary times, this continues because we fail to recognise the epistemological situatedness of theories, concepts, paradigms and tools we assume as relevant and use in our research. The continuation of such underlying assumptions (starting with the very concept of science or theory as a telos in itself) can transpose western or other dominant culture/ethnocentric assumptions to non-western, underrepresented or ethnic minority communities and contexts.

Current issues in research practice, funding and publishing

-
- Dominance of English language in teaching and published research, which favours Anglophone standards of knowledge production (language and epistemology are interlinked as conceptual repertoires express distinct worldviews and lifeways).
 - Western Euro-centric standards of knowledge validation, research excellence and impact, as seen in citation politics, peer review norms and modes/forms of knowledge production & sharing.
 - Research funding distribution, funding priorities, eligibility criteria, data management laws and due diligence expectations favouring Northern academics and Southerners with privileged access to Northern institutions and funding
 - Geographic distribution of publishing houses, with most high-impact journals being in Northern (westernised and/or highly industrialised societies), perpetuating western Euro-centric publication metrics, such as through journal indexing and citations.
 - Unreflexive research methodologies and practices, that include ethnocentric theorisations and interpretation of research data, inequitable practices or attitudes vis-à-vis research participants, research assistants or research participants, extractionist models of research, etc.

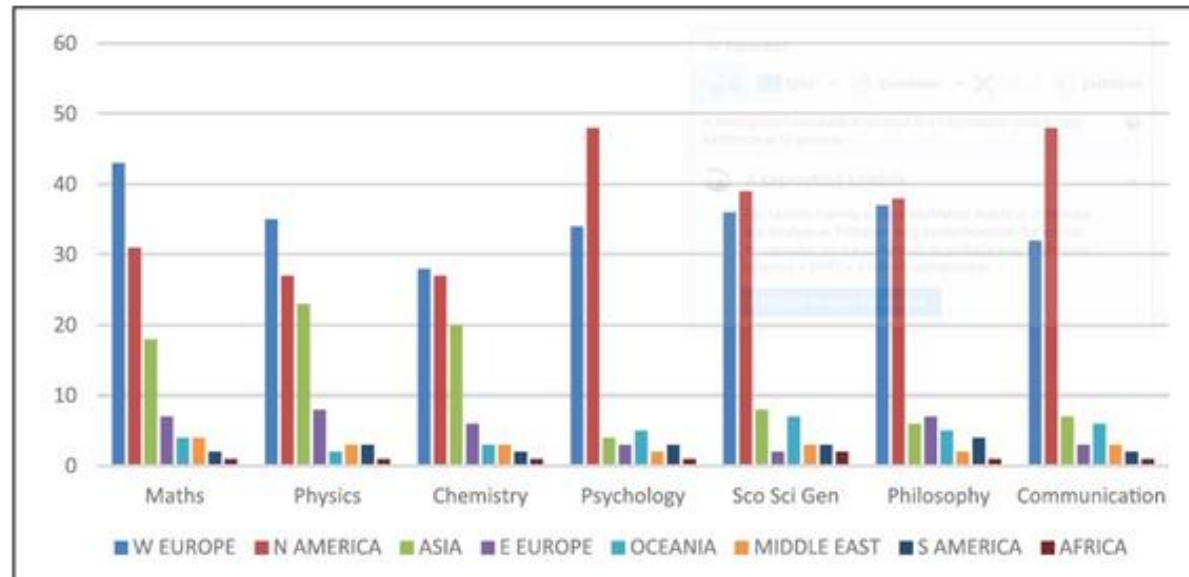
Funding asymmetries

- Sub-Saharan Africa: 0.7 percent of world total
- Central and Eastern Europe: 4.47 percent of world total
- North America and Western Europe: 46.5 percent of world total



Publishing asymmetries

- Contribution of world regions in different disciplines from 1975 to 2017, by the affiliation of authors of research articles indexed in SCI/SSCI WoS.
- Note: Vertical axis (left) shows the percentage of a given world region. SCI = science fields; SSCI = social science fields; WoS = Web of Science.



Source: Demeter (2019)

SOAS Decolonising Research Initiative (launched in 2019)

Conversation event: Applying a Decolonial Lens to Research Structures, Norms and Practices in Higher Education Institutions



Research methodologies,
practices and norms
(researchers)



Research funding priorities,
eligibility and due diligence
standards (funders)



Research development practices
and processes (research offices)

Reconsidering funding structures and international research collaborations

-
- Efforts to decolonise research development standards and raise awareness around Northern-led funding structures and understandings of research excellence and impact.
 - Efforts to promote equitable and more dialogical research collaborations and to foster mutual knowledge sharing between research officers, researchers and funding bodies across countries.
 - Funders involving more Southern researchers in the peer review of funding proposals and Northern funding bodies seeking partnerships with Southern counterparts, etc.

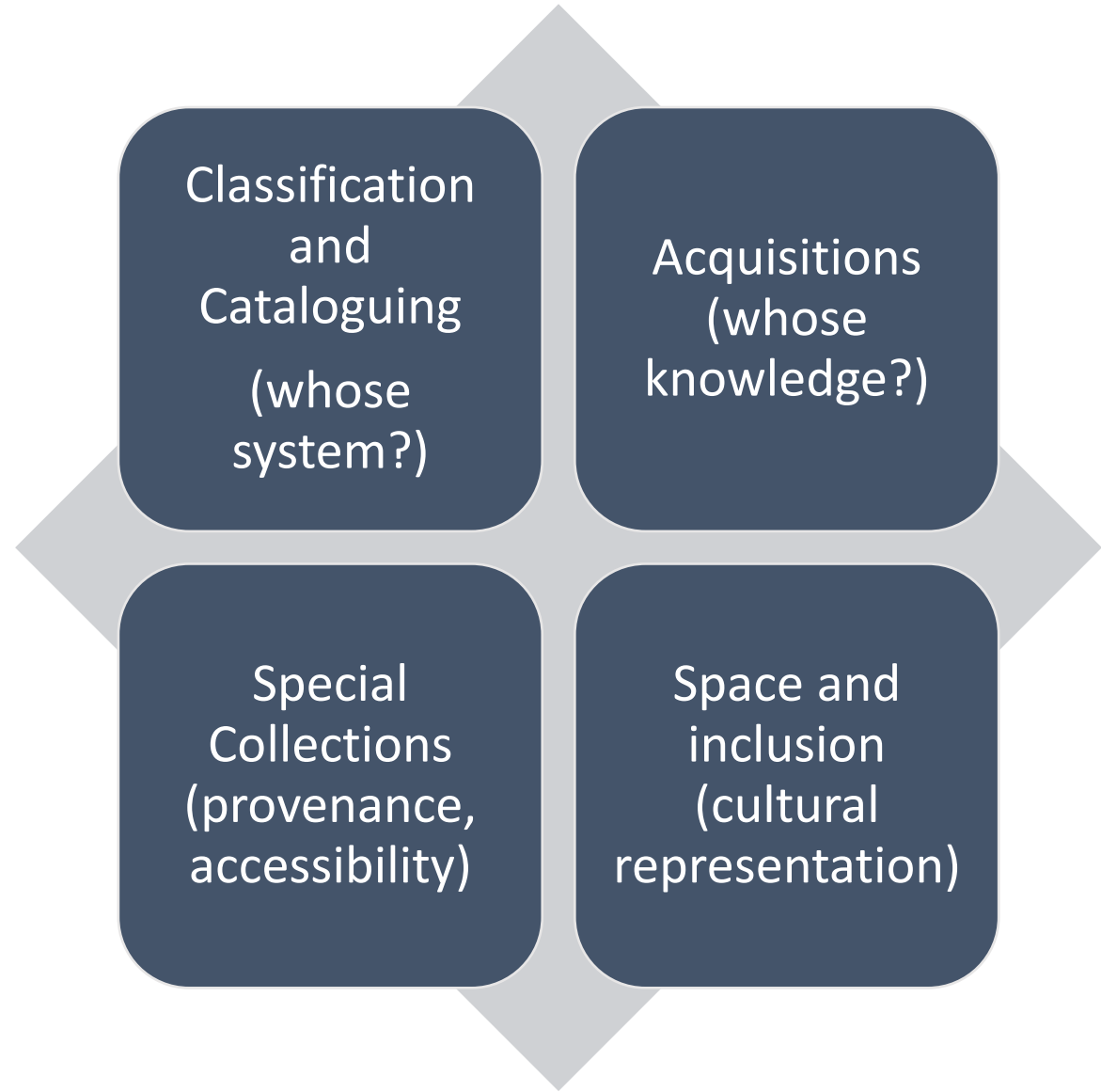
Improving researcher reflexivity and reconsidering ethical research

-
- Increased problematisation of researcher subjectivity and the need to foster humility and reflexivity in research, data analysis and theory-making.
 - Active efforts to decolonise knowledge production and research methodologies by engaging more substantively with and citing non-western, indigenous, female and other marginalised or minoritized voices.
 - Systematic efforts to revisit how we understand ethical research and how to translate guidelines into embodied praxis in researchers' engagement with communities, research assistants and research partners.

Open Access/Science and multilingualism movements

-
- New initiatives to promote Open Access publishing/Open Science dissemination to overcome material barriers fostering inequalities in publishing and in access to knowledge.
 - Efforts to promote non-western, marginalised and endangered languages and to connect knowledge production with real communities and societal issues by making research accessible in more languages and diverse formats.
 - Movements to digitise libraries and archives (especially those of dubious origin with direct relevance to non-western/indigenous communities).

Digitising library collections



Limitations of Open Access publishing models

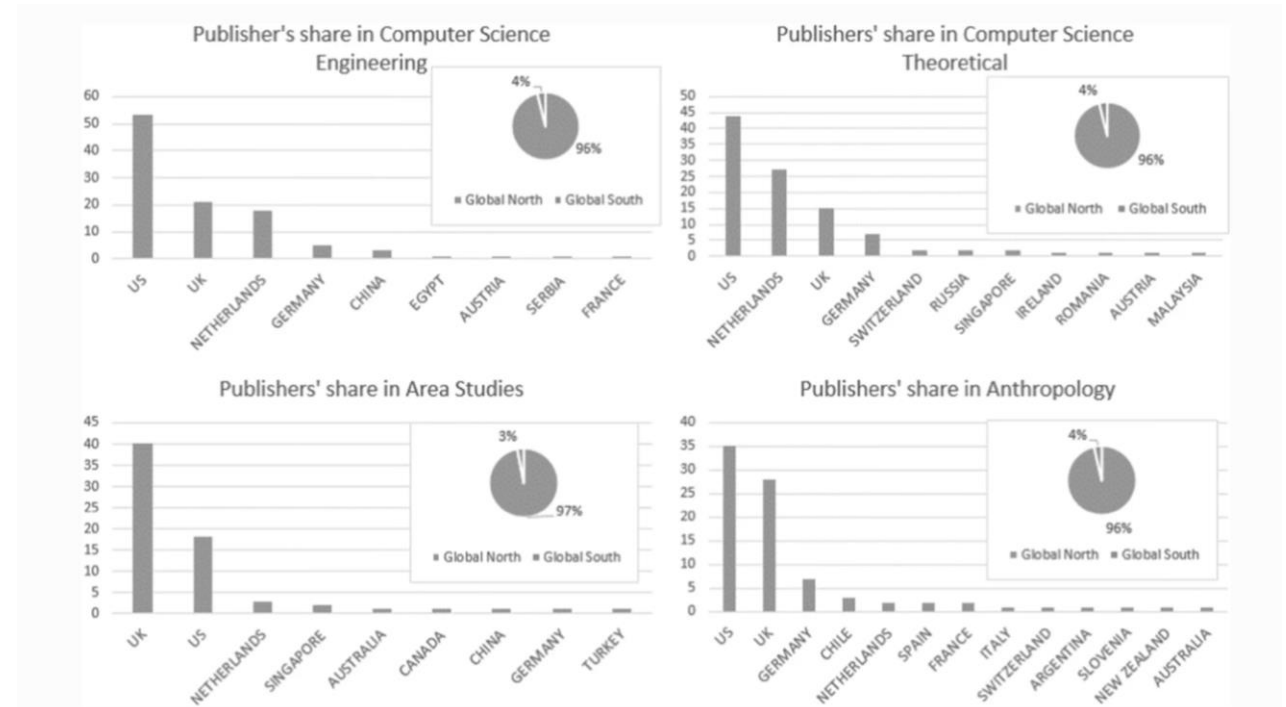
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- Despite a diversification in theoretical frameworks and a better engagement with non-English speaking scholarship, the language of science remains largely English (although publishing in Spanish is becoming more popular, e.g. Iberoamerican journals).
 - The current Open Access publishing model has become another business model for large publishers - Article Processing Costs (APCs) charged under hybrid or Gold OA models correlate positively with Impact Factor in Northern-dominated disciplines, which anticipates an increase in publishing inequalities in these disciplines (Demeter and Istratii 2020).
 - The problem of scholarship being the preserve of academia continues, despite efforts to bridge rigorous research with societal affairs – economic inequalities and a system that favours western Euro-centric standards means that those at the margins can hardly make it in this system (without risking co-optation, e.g. by migrating to the North).

Scrutinising what Open Access Journals Mean for Global Inequalities (Demeter and Istratii 2020)

-
- The study found significant positive correlations between APCs and IF in Area Studies and Anthropology but not in Computer Science (Theoretical and Engineering). The average APCs in Anthropology and Area Studies were found to be considerably higher than in Computer Science (Theoretical and Engineering).
 - Both Anthropology and Area Studies were found to be dominated by Northern publishers. The implication is that different subject areas are dominated by more or less internationally distributed publishers, which shapes their interest in IF journals, the kind of market competition they face, and subsequently the APCs they choose/are able to charge.
 - Authors in Southern regions of the world will be challenged to publish as prolifically as their Northern peers, but will be especially challenged to publish in Global North-dominated subject areas and journals, such as in Anthropology and Area Studies.
 - In subject areas that are dominated by Northern publishers, the level of APCs charged and IF will move together, which, combined with the existing economic inequalities among countries, are anticipated to grow publishing disparities between Northern and Southern researchers.

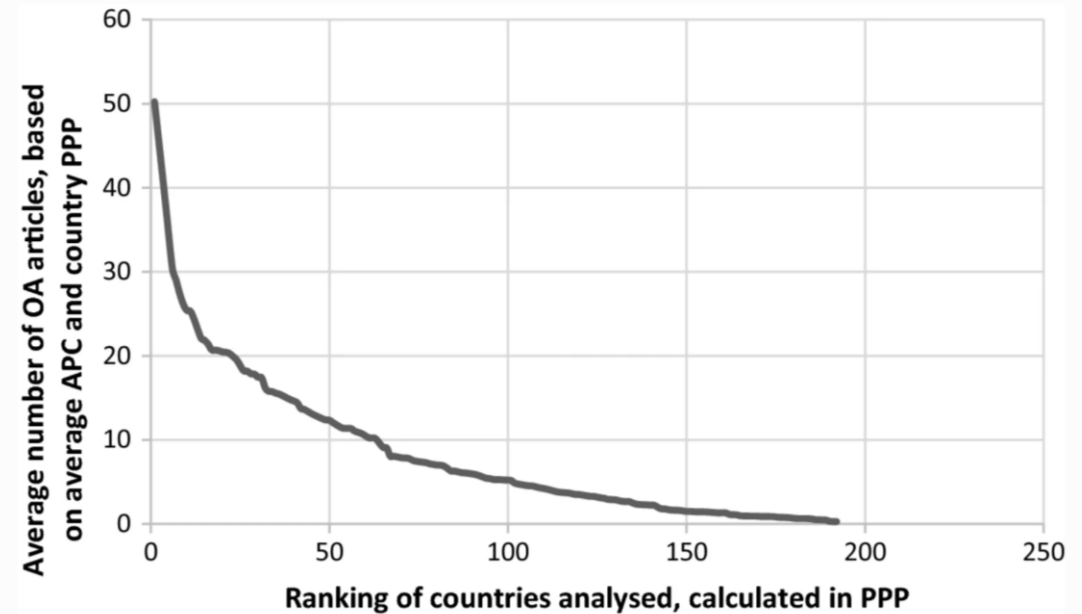
Global Distribution of Publishers

- The share in world publications for the Global North cumulatively is 96–97 percent.
- The less wealthy or peripheral regions are extremely underrepresented in terms of 'high-impact' published research in all the analysed fields.
- But, considerable differences within the centre and across wealthier nations.



OA articles per year for different countries

- The horizontal axis shows the analysed countries by World Bank ranking 2018. This ranking assigns the countries (range: 1–192) by their annual per capita GDP (PPP).
- The vertical axis shows the number of OA articles per year that could be theoretically published by country (calculated by dividing the country per capita GDP (PPP) by the average APC)
- The majority are found in the area of < 20 articles per year, which explains why the diagram is long-tailed





Knowledge
Equity
Lab

Decolonial
Subversions

Some initiatives working to change the system



World Virtual Indigenous Circle
Open Science & the
Decolonization of Knowledge



GLOBAL TAPESTRY of ALTERNATIVES

The Global Tapestry of Alternatives seeks to build bridges between networks of Alternatives around the globe and promote the creation of new processes of confluence. [More information »](#)



weavers

GTA is a "network of networks". Each of those networks acts in different parts of the planet by identifying and connecting Alternatives. They are the Weavers.



endorsements

Many progressive, post-developent and anticapitalist organizations around the world endorse this initiative. Also many academics, activists and referents do so.



roadmap

Our mission is complex and ambitious. Our journey is long-winded. Learn how we are achieving it, step by step, in our open and dynamic roadmap.

Decolonial Subversions



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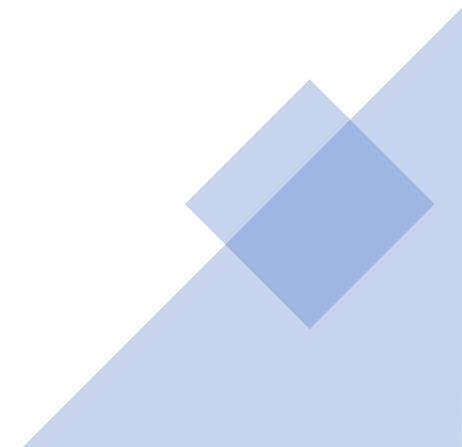
Contact

The work of Decolonial Subversions

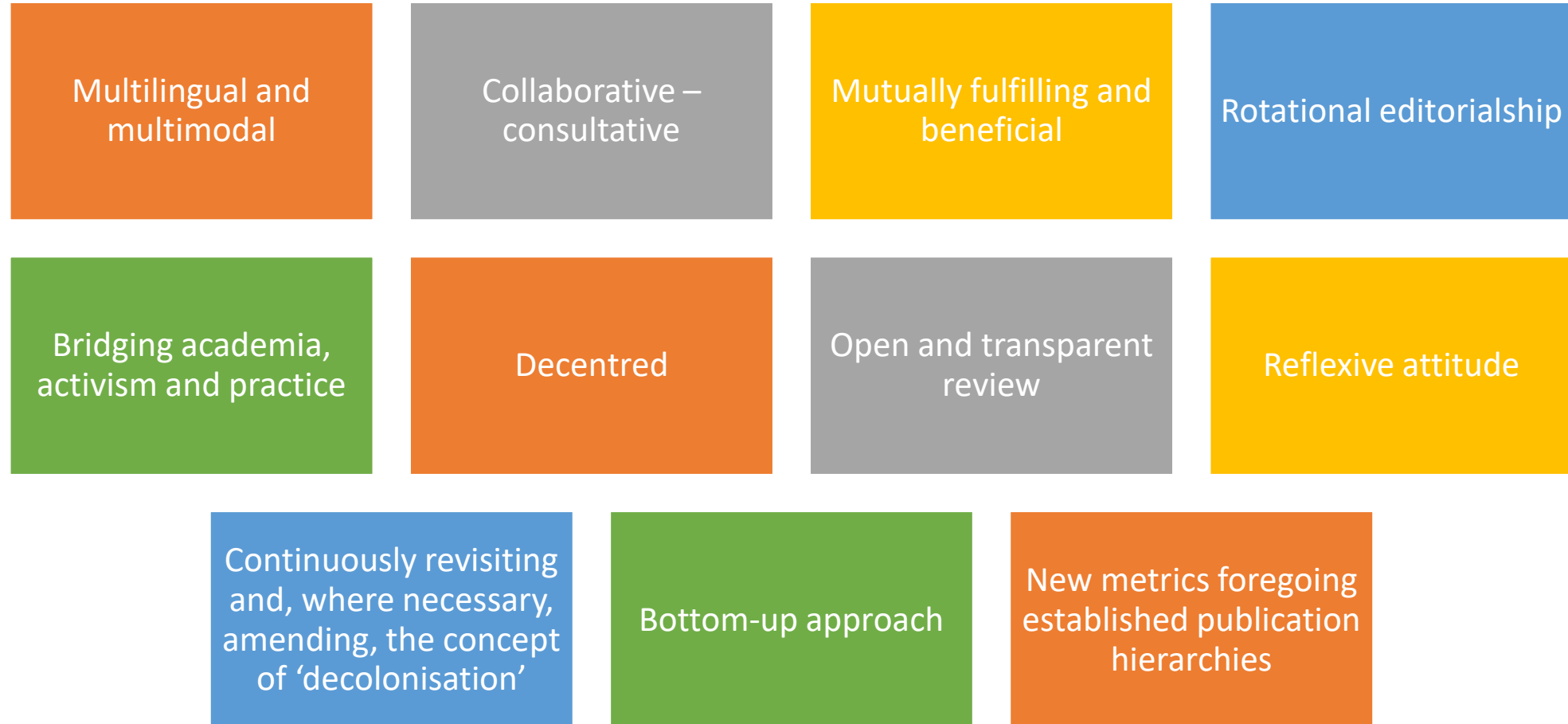
- In response to these asymmetries, Decolonial Subversions publishes free of charge and encourages contributors to submit their contributions in their native languages, where an English version can also be provided, or to translate contributions in English to languages pertinent to the communities of research or contributed content. Decolonial Subversions has also pioneered a new open review process that encourages transparency and a higher degree of dialogue between reviewer and author.



Open access (free), multilingual, digital publishing

- Website built by colleagues in India to be user-friendly in a Southern context
 - Use of media, such as Academia.edu, YouTube, Soundcloud to bridge academic publishing with real communities and societal events and needs
 - Mobile friendly, easy to download and access
- 

Aspired modus operandi





Key achievements

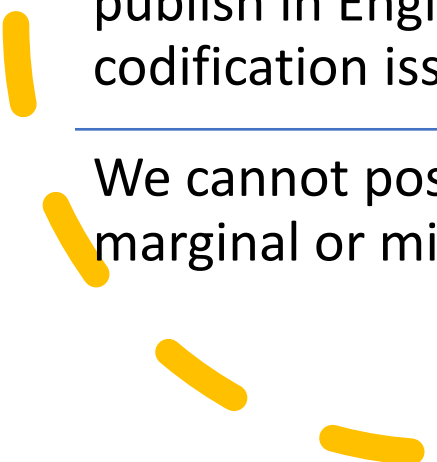
- The platform has published 3 main issues and 1 special issue in 3 years and has published outputs (written, acoustic and visual) in 6 languages
- It has set in motion a rotational editorialship model (two special issues led by/with external editors)
- It has attracted a large network of advisory board members, editorial board members, language partners, editors, reviewers and translators from over 15 countries
- It has established an active discussion group (led by a cooperative member), whose outputs are published in the main issues


Challenges and impact

Decolonial Subversions cannot single-handedly subvert a deeply embedded normative system of writing and publishing that includes the persistent marginalisation of embodied and non-discursive knowledge.

Challenges to move towards a genuine and sustainable multilingual publishing model (as a result of a nexus of reasons, including many Southern contributors' preference/need to publish in English, demanding editorial support for non-English speakers, language codification issues, etc.).

We cannot possibly address all the needs and sensibilities expressed by underrepresented, marginal or minoritized communities, primarily due to material and financial constraints





Addressing domestic violence in religio-culturally sensitive ways: The approach of Project dldl/ድልድል in Ethiopia and the UK

Dr Romina Istratii, Principal Investigator of Project dldl/ድልድል and UKRI Future Leaders Fellow at SOAS University of London

Presented at CNEDA Quarterly Call, May 2023

Project dldl/ድልድል

A 1.2 million research and innovation project funded by UK Research and Innovation under the Future Leaders Fellowship scheme (2020-2024) to promote and develop theology-informed, culturally-appropriate responses to domestic violence in Ethiopia and the UK.

The project's approach is informed by a decolonial understanding of historical inequalities in the system governing research and development and of the marginalisation of religious knowledge in a highly secularised technoscientific paradigm.

The project aims to:

- Build evidence, develop research-informed interventions and strengthen local infrastructures in domestic violence prevention and response in collaboration with and through existing response mechanisms in Ethiopia.
- Feed this evidence and practical knowledge to the UK domestic violence sector so that the latter can cater effectively to migrant, ethnic minority communities in faith-sensitive and culturally-appropriate ways.



Committed to a decolonial impact-oriented approach

-
- We depart from historical approaches in gender-sensitive and domestic violence research that have defined or theorised gender relations or domestic violence in western European or other ethnocentric ways.
 - We also depart from established epistemologies of 'religion' that have been informed by western societies' experience with Western Christianity, theological dogmatism and secularisation processes.
 - We seek to reverse the knowledge transfer in international development and public health interventions, whereby knowledge, paradigms and standards have been defined in the West and imposed to the rest by fostering Southern-Northern knowledge exchange and genuine collaboration.
 - We avoid rigidly predefining what impact should look like and aim to prioritise what stakeholders and communities understand as impactful interventions in their respective contexts.

Using innovative, cross-sector, multilingual, locally- appropriate methodologies

- Employing multilingual, community-grounded and participatory approaches that can allow us to understand the life of the communities and to build genuine trust and communication.
- Employing interactive, visual and other innovative research methods to adapt to the conditions and needs of the local population and to achieve more inclusivity.
- Being aware and reflexive of our complex positionalities and how these inform research and interventions processes.
- Working through a diverse team of researchers (including female, younger researchers and community-based practitioners) from different religio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds who are supported with training to be able to lead research activities and to participate actively in data analysis and the publishing process.

Purposefully and intentionally reverse the one-way knowledge transfer in domestic violence definitions, theorisations and practical responses

Structured to achieve and sustain this over time.

E.g.: design of work packages proceeding from Ethiopia to UK, collaboratively formulated contracts, decentralised model of programme design and implementation

Two-way knowledge exchange

E.g.: international conference in Ethiopia and the UK, exchange of 'specialists'; webinars by East African and UK/international speakers and communities

Equitable team development

E.g.: Fellow development, staff & partners' development, trainings jointly decided, listening-focused mentoring, development that leverages on local resources and knowledge exchange

Project dldl/ደልደል: A research and innovation project dedicated to the development and strengthening of religio-culturally sensitive, domestic violence alleviation systems in Ethiopia and the UK

Dr Romina Istratii - SOAS, University of London

What is project dldl/ደልደል?

Project dldl/ደልደል is a research and innovation project dedicated to the development and strengthening of religio-culturally sensitive, domestic violence alleviation systems in Ethiopia and the UK. The project seeks to promote a decolonial approach to addressing domestic violence in religious communities by engaging substantively with the religio-cultural belief systems of the victims/survivors and the perpetrators, and by understanding how these belief systems interface with gender, material and psychological parameters to facilitate or deter domestic violence. Working with Ethiopian and Eritrean collaborators, and rural and urban communities, the project seeks to generate new research and intervention approaches, and to apply this knowledge to inform strategies for integrating in domestic violence services and better-supporting affected ethnic minority and migrant populations in the UK.

Strategies

1. Working dialogically with partners & employing people-centred methodologies
2. Building on context-specific knowledge & new evidence
3. Connecting with existing DV infrastructure & initiatives
4. Brokering cross-sectoral learning & partnerships through knowledge exchange activities

Impact

1. Preparedness among clergy & seminarians to respond to DV victims & perpetrators
2. Religio-cultural sensitivity in NGO/state-led DV sectors
3. Integrated DV systems and better served affected populations
4. Reciprocal research partnerships & mutual professional development

Outcomes

1. New practice bridging religious studies, development & public health to address DV
2. Bespoke curricula for seminarians & multilingual training platform for clergy & DV providers
3. New multi-stakeholder knowledge exchange platform
4. Pilot programme leveraging religious & spiritual language for perpetrator & victim support

Who is involved in the project?

The project works through partnerships with academic and non-governmental organisations in the project countries, including Aksum University (Aksum, Ethiopia), the St Frumentius Abba Selama Kessate Berhan Theological College (Mekelle, Ethiopia), the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), Diversity Resource International (Brighton, UK), EMIRTA Research, Training and Development Centre (Ethiopia), the University of Bristol (Bristol, UK) and the University of Sheffield (Sheffield, UK).

How Do We Work?

A decolonial impact-oriented approach: Our main premise is that meaningful and impactful interventions emerge when they are designed from the ground up informed by empirical evidence and real-life experiences

RESEARCH



ENGAGEMENT & INTEGRATION

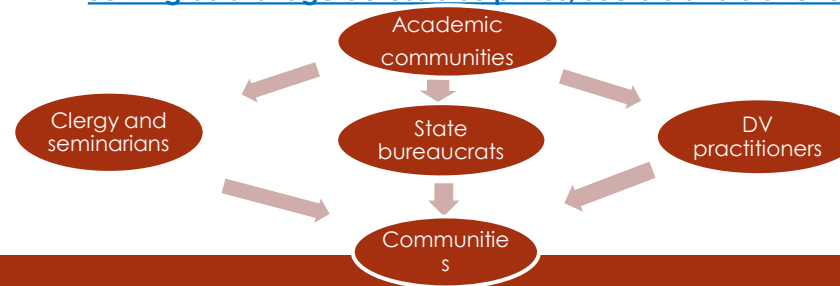


KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE



- ❖ Research to understand better how attitudes of domestic violence are informed by religious beliefs and to explore associations with psychological factors (intergenerational violence, trauma, personality disorders, etc.).
- ❖ Research to identify how religious beliefs can serve as a deterrent to becoming abusive or as a coping and healing mechanism for perpetrators and victims/survivors respectively.
- ❖ Research to explore the effectiveness of faith-based interventions internationally and to develop a faith-based perpetrator treatment programme.
- ❖ Research to understand the level of integration of religio-cultural parameters in secular domestic violence sectors and to identify ways to improve integration.
- ❖ Workshops with clergy to provide them with theological, ethnographic and safeguarding training to respond to domestic violence better.
- ❖ Workshops with secular providers (government and non-governmental organisations, social workers, psychologists, etc.) to raise awareness about the complex role of religio-cultural parameters in domestic violence and how to integrate those constructively in their own work.
- ❖ Curriculum development with university and theology instructors to integrate gender issues and domestic violence in education and clergy training and preparation for service.
- ❖ Partnerships with constituent organisations, including religious bodies, government and domestic violence providers to strengthen existing infrastructure.
- ❖ Communication of research results to relevant stakeholders through meetings and personal outreach.
- ❖ Publication of working papers and a blog to achieve knowledge exchange and to promote cross-sectoral collaboration.
- ❖ Delivery of regular webinars and international conferences on specialised topics that are targeted at multiple stakeholders to promote more integrated approaches to domestic violence.
- ❖ Production of films to create awareness and improve multi-stakeholder and public understanding of domestic violence and the complex intersections with religious, socio-cultural, psychological and migration-related parameters.

Serving as a bridge across disciplines, sectors and stakeholders



Milestones achieved so far

- 2** literature reviews completed (1 academic paper published)
- 4** language translations on the website published
- 5** working papers published
- 6** international webinars and 1 international conference organised in 2020-2022
- 7** workshops on domestic violence with clergy delivered in Ethiopia in 2021
- 133** members subscribed on the project's multistakeholder platform
- 155** clergy trained on domestic violence in 2021
- 30,000+** web page views since April 2021



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International conference in Ethiopia

Media coverage (in Amharic): [የቤት ውስጥ ጥቃትን ለመከላከል - YouTube](#)



Key accomplishments

Multiple research and intervention programmes completed, building new evidence and promoting faith-sensitive and integrated responses to domestic violence and abuse in Ethiopia and internationally.

Multistakeholder discussion group established, bringing together religious stakeholders, domestic violence researchers and domestic violence practitioners for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

New evidence built and disseminated around the intersection of religious beliefs, the psychology of violence and intimate partner behaviour, through literature reviews, webinar series, conference and knowledge exchange activities.

Knowledge exchange and mutual learning promoted and achieved between Ethiopia and the UK, and counterparts in US and Canada.

Career development opportunities and organisational growth pathways created for partners, collaborators, research associates, independent specialists, translators, creative artists and others.

Challenges

- Despite the collaborative and radically subversive model that we employ, power hierarchies or dynamics cannot be simply eliminated as they constitute the very context we operate in (power asymmetries grounded in funding structures and governance systems, power asymmetries experienced within organisations that we work with in Ethiopia or the UK, and power dynamics that affect interactions between researchers and partners).
- Like human relations, some partnerships fail and some thrive – not always because of underlying and inevitable power inequalities, but because many parameters (including forces beyond human control) contribute to two parties following different paths of action at any given time. International partnerships-building requires an approach that understands people's conflicting priorities within the organisational cultures they exist in and the complex psychological mechanisms involved in human decision-making.
- The project can serve as a prototype that can be scaled out, but it cannot subvert the current system or by itself mainstream a different model of relationality. This would require regional/larger-scale initiatives led by regional/local creativity, resourcefulness and priorities.



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Resources

- SOAS Decolonising Research Initiative (includes links to published outputs): <https://www.soas.ac.uk/research/research-vision-and-strategy/decolonising-research-initiative>
- Project dldl/ድልድል: <https://projectdldl.org/>
- Decolonial Subversions: <http://decolonialsubversions.org/index.html>
- *The LONG READ on DECOLONISING KNOWLEDGE: How western Eurocentrism is systemically preserved and what we can do to subvert it.* Convivial Thinking:
https://convivialthinking.org/index.php/2020/02/29/decolonising-knowledge/?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=socialnetwork

Thank you for your attention! የቅንጥል! አመሰግናለሁ!

- For questions or comments, please contact me at ri5@soas.ac.uk
- To read more about project dldl/ድልድል, visit projectdldl.org
- To receive project updates, join the JISC email list **DV-Gender-Faith** (public list)
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