

# Decolonising Research for Justice: Ethical Imperatives and Practical Applications

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Hyacinth Udah<sup>1</sup> 

## Abstract

This article examines coloniality of research and discusses the theoretical foundations, ethical imperatives, and practical ways for conducting decolonial research for justice. It emphasises the need to shift away from research paradigms and approaches that perpetuate coloniality to a commitment to embracing the complexities and challenges of conducting decolonial research. The article contributes to the broader discourse on decolonising knowledge production. Drawing on the works of scholars addressing disobedient and defiant research, the article advocates for transformative decolonial praxis, suggesting the need to reimagine research and displace the hegemony and dominance of Western knowledge systems, which marginalise and delegitimise other epistemological traditions. Beyond critiquing coloniality embedded within research, the article proposes practical ways to inform anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-oppressive research practice. It argues that decolonial research requires defiance and resistance against non-relational, hierarchical, and extractive practices, involving critical examination of assumptions and values, centring non-Western voices and perspectives, dismantling coloniality and working towards social and epistemic justice in solidarity with Indigenous and other historically marginalised and oppressed groups. It calls researchers to integrate decolonial principles and frameworks into their research practices.

## Keywords

coloniality, decoloniality, epistemic justice, solidarity, transformative praxis, research practice

## Introduction

Nationally and internationally, there is a growing recognition that research needs to be decolonised (Datta, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017; Smith, 2012; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021; Udah, 2023a), yet there remains a huge amount of work to be done to assert Indigenous, and marginalised voices and perspectives in research knowledge production (Akena, 2012). While resistance to non-Western methodologies and perspectives could be a crucial contributing factor among researchers ignoring exercises of decoloniality, and upholding coloniality in research (Daley & Murrey, 2022), decolonisation is a necessary project in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Smith, 2012). The decolonial project is an analytic project that exposes ongoing coloniality and the lingering effects of colonialism in knowledge production.

Western knowledge still claims superiority and delegitimises the voices and perspectives of non-Western people. As Akena (2012) points out, the delegitimation of Indigenous and other forms of knowledge and the corresponding

imposition of Western knowledge as legitimate and universal imply that to understand a social phenomenon, we must study the phenomenon within Western Eurocentric systems of knowledge. Thus, colonial research constitutes a form of epistemic injustice. It leaves value hierarchies and relations of knowing unchanged and delegitimises non-Western ways of knowing and epistemological contributions (Kerfoot & Bello-Nonjengele, 2023). This article, therefore, aims to inspire and encourage a deeper engagement in decolonial research for transformative praxis. This goal is pursued through the lens of a black African academic and researcher based in Australia, whose approach to coloniality and decolonial thought is

<sup>1</sup> College of Arts, Society and Education, Social Work, James Cook University, Douglas, QLD, Australia

### Corresponding Author:

Hyacinth Udah, College of Arts, Society and Education, Social Work, James Cook University, Douglas, 1 James Cook Drive, QLD 4814, Australia.  
Email: [hyacinth.udah@jcu.edu.au](mailto:hyacinth.udah@jcu.edu.au)



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shaped by personal experiences of migration, education, research, teaching, and struggles for social justice, including insights from the works of anti-racist scholars addressing disobedient and defiant scholarships. Despite their effects, and violence on Indigenous and African people, colonial legacies and epistemes persist in contemporary society, education, and research (Daley & Murrey, 2022).

## Positionality

First, acknowledgment is given to the author's identity as an African immigrant to Australia, specifically from Nigeria, not Latin America. From an early age growing up in the city of Aba, there was encouragement to love and embrace Western ways of doing things, resulting in academic excellence and positive schooling experiences until leaving Africa. Before coming to Australia, there was not enough understanding of the differences between settler colonialism<sup>1</sup> and non-settler colonialism. Nigeria was colonised (not settled) by the British, while Australia was *invaded*, *colonised*, and *settled* by the British.

As a black African and Igbo immigrant of Nigerian descent in Australia, the imprints of coloniality and decolonial aspirations are ingrained within the body and the legacies to which the author belongs (Dutta, 2023). Fanon (1963) explains that "decolonisation never takes place unnoticed" but makes visible colonial violence and Indigenous peoples' resistance to it (p. 36). In the same way, coming to Australia raised and awakened consciousness regarding the struggles against colonialism. Awareness of the impact of ongoing coloniality, the colonial 'epistemic violence' of imposing Eurocentric ways of knowing, and the racism embedded within colonial education was heightened through the works of scholars (e.g., Daley & Murrey, 2022; Dutta, 2023; Fanon, 1963; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017; Smith, 2012; Udah, 2017).

In Australia, for example, coloniality remains a driving force behind the politics of identity and belonging and operates both implicitly and explicitly to inferiorise, dehumanise and marginalise non-whites (Udah, 2021a), relegating them to perpetual alterity (Dutta, 2023). Though Australian citizens, racialised immigrants and black scholars still live under coloniality (Gatwiri & Udah, 2024; Udah, 2021b). Formerly seen as a Third World student, there is a continued racialisation as an African scholar. Additionally, Australian society, institutions (academia), and the research context are deeply influenced by coloniality (Gatwiri & Udah, 2024; Udah, 2023a). As a black academic and former international student from the Global South,<sup>2</sup> and guided by solidarity with oppressed people, research focus has been on transforming racist colonial structures of domination and marginalisation into structures of belonging (Udah, 2018; Udah & Singh, 2019). Drawing on the works of scholars who work to unsettle and displace the hegemony of European epistemological traditions to produce disobedient and defiant scholarship (Daley & Murrey, 2022), this work is part of a broader social

justice agenda to challenge and disrupt epistemologies of power and oppression that validate and impose Western knowledge as legitimate. Commitment to anti-racism and epistemic justice is central.

Decolonisation, therefore, is about countering coloniality and its ongoing violence. It is a research imperative. A decolonial lens is considered necessary for disrupting the coloniality of research and recognising the contributions of Indigenous and non-Western (such as African) intellectuals to research, theories, and frameworks in knowledge production. Hence, this article asks: What is the goal of decolonial research and what does it mean for research to be decolonial? How can research be decolonised? What can prevent researchers from doing decolonial research? What is the ethical imperative of researchers committed to doing research with racialised, marginalised, and oppressed people in the context of the decolonial demand for the recognition of other (ed) ways of knowing? Thus, this article explores coloniality of research and discusses the theoretical foundations, ethical imperatives, complexities and challenges, and practical ways of conducting decolonial research. The aim is to promote knowledge of, and commitment to, anti-racist research, emphasising the need to shift away from research systems, paradigms and approaches that perpetuate coloniality.

## Coloniality of Research

For many years, colonialism has shaped research (Tuck & Yang, 2014; Tynan, 2021), playing an instrumental role in the ways in which research is done in non-relational, hierarchical, and extractive ways (Gaudry, 2011; Mbembe, 2016; Tucker, 2018; Tynan, 2021). As Gaudry (2011) explains, the extractive process in research involves removing knowledge from "its immediate context [often from a marginal or under researched community] and presenting it to a highly specialised group of outsiders [usually highly educated academic audience or government bureaucracy]" (p.114). For most researchers, applying [extractive] model constitutes good academic research. It is usually rewarded with degrees, jobs, tenure, and research funding (Gaudry, 2011). However, extraction research is colonial. It manifests colonial relationships and follows hegemonic "Eurocentric epistemic canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production" (Mbembe, 2016, p. 32).

As a concept, coloniality captures and recognises the enduring structures of colonial dominance shaped by five centuries of European colonialism and conditions of power, encompassing entrenched modes of being, knowing, and authority in contemporary society (Quijano, 2016). Coloniality survives colonialism and permeates fundamental frameworks of modern societal structures, including research (Daniel, 2022). As a process, coloniality manifests through (1) hierarchical systems that valorise Whiteness as a category of power and privilege; (2) imposition of Western knowledge as

universal; and (3) structures and institutions that subjugate colonised populations (Udah, 2017; 2023a).

Coloniality of power manifests in particular forms of domination that defines individuals, cultures, intersubjectivity, and relationships (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). It engages with the enduring realities of race, class, and gender experiences in contemporary society (Quijano, 2016). Coloniality of knowledge is seen in the imposition of Eurocentric perspectives, methodologies, and epistemologies as universal (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017) and the corresponding erasure of non-Western epistemologies (Gatwiri & Udah, 2024) in various aspects and levels of everyday experience (in the classroom, university, and society — media, curriculum, research, criteria for academic performance, and aspirations). Existing colonial matrix of power and knowledge influences every aspect of society, from controlling historical narratives, economics, politics, culture, gender, and sexuality, to dictating language usage, and regulating individual beliefs and perspectives, and even impacting health and knowledge (Mignolo, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017) as well as perpetuating inequalities based on race, ethnicity, class, and other social categories (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). The logic of coloniality affects all epistemologies — knowledge production and research practice. Research remains largely Western and Eurocentric, needing delinking and disruption (Mignolo, 2007).

## Decolonisation and Research

Ongoing colonial influence and dominance of Western knowledge systems in research has led increasing numbers of Indigenous, African and scholars from the Global South to call for the decolonisation (Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017; Obiagu, 2023; Smith, 2012; Tynan, 2021; Udah, 2020, 2023b). Obiagu (2023), for one, calls for decolonising existing programmes to embed Indigenous epistemologies, which involves resisting hegemonic voices, and centring the voices and perspectives of the subjugated. Moreton-Robinson (2015) emphasises the need for more collaborative and inclusive approaches to research, arguing that Western knowledge systems have historically marginalised and silenced Indigenous voices and asserted dominance in defining humanity and determining what constitutes valid knowledge. Similarly, Smith (2012) calls for research practices that are more culturally appropriate, respectful, ethical, relational and acknowledges the significance of Indigenous perspectives, knowing and theorising. For these scholars, decolonisation serves as a valuable framework for fostering justice and disrupting coloniality in research.

As a process, decolonisation is not about ticking a box nor a methodical checklist, rather it seeks to disrupt (Tuck & Yang, 2014) and dismantle taken-for-granted practices that continue to maintain colonial perspectives (Muñoz-Arce & Rain, 2022). The decolonial project invites researchers to cultivate a heightened awareness of the implicit assumptions in their

research methodologies and paradigms and to disengage, and break, from the logics and values ingrained by colonial knowledge paradigms (Smith, 2012). This involves changing models and structures of thought as well as making diverse perspectives emerge to advance the construction of knowledge (Muñoz-Arce & Rain, 2022).

In Smith's (2012) seminal work, decolonisation is anti-colonial — a process that confronts colonialism. It is also anti-racist and anti-oppressive. Decolonisation is more about dismantling colonial knowledge structures and redistributing power to non-Eurocentric ways of knowing (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). It emphasises the need to challenge colonial structures of knowledge production (Datta, 2018) and to centre the voices, perspectives, and epistemologies of marginalised groups (Daniel, 2022; Perera et al., 2022). In research, therefore, decolonisation is a continuous process of becoming, unlearning, relearning, re-existing (as opposed to resisting) and recreating oneself as a researcher and delinking to conduct more ethical and relational research.

For Mignolo (2007), decolonisation means delinking. Delinking entails epistemic disobedience and active defiance to engage with other forms and ways of thinking and doing (Daley & Murrey, 2022). Decolonising research means, therefore, challenging colonial forms of knowledge dominance (Castillo, 2023), getting rid of hierarchies (Maldonado-Torres, 2016); embracing epistemological diversity (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021); recognising the connection between power, racial authority, and scholarly inquiry (Tucker, 2018), and centring the experiences, perspectives, voices, theories and worldviews of Indigenous and other subjugated and marginalised communities in research (Smith, 2012). Hence, the call to 'decolonise' is twofold: "on the one hand, it seeks to counteract the dehumanisation that colonisation, slavery, settler colonialism, imperialism and their vestiges have instilled within communities; on the other, it seeks to reconstitute systems and processes in ways that unearth and advance subjugated knowledges through Indigenous and collective forms of learning that are radically humanising for all" (Bajaj, 2022, p. 3). In the pursuit of decolonial research, there is also a need to work from defiant scholarship.

## Defiant Scholarship and Decolonial Research

Within decolonial thought, many defiant African scholars — in and outside of Africa — have critiqued the dominance of Western knowledge production and challenged the marginalisation of African knowledge in research and scholarship (Daley & Murrey, 2022; Gatwiri & Udah, 2024; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Drawing on Walter Mignolo's (2007) epistemic disobedience, defiant scholarship calls for an epistemic break from colonialities of knowledge and working against prevailing Eurocentric epistemological traditions. In other words, defiant scholarship is grounded in the active pursuit of epistemic disobedience and epistemic justice (Daley & Murrey, 2022).

Defiant decolonial scholarship is attentive, and in opposition, to the colonality of knowledge informing research practices (Daley & Murrey, 2022). It seeks to delink from the hegemony of European epistemological traditions. For Daley and Murrey (2022), defiance is an important tool to dismantle colonality of knowledge within research. Defiant scholarship, therefore, moves toward decoloniality and includes alternative ways of knowing and thinking that are not legitimised (nor seek legitimisation) by or through dominant colonial epistemic lenses (Daley & Murrey, 2022). For many defiant scholars, research needs to be decolonial, disobedient and defiant to colonial epistemologies and Western frames of thinking and knowing. They argue that the path to decolonising research requires defiance (Daley & Murrey, 2022; Muñoz-Arce & Rain, 2022), epistemic disobedience (Udah, 2023c), delinking and breaking from existing patterns of colonality (Mignolo, 2007) and recognising the cultural domain of the other (Gatwiri et al., 2023). For defiant scholars, decolonising research involves questioning and challenging assumptions and simultaneously being attentive and responsive to the ways in which colonality marginalises Indigenous and African knowledges and effects projects for epistemic justice (Daley & Murrey, 2022).

### Lessons Learned from Earlier Research Studies

From a decolonial perspective, research is profoundly implicated in epistemic (in)justice. Most of the earlier research scholarships, conducted by the author, have special interest in social justice, emancipation, and solidarity with marginalised and oppressed groups. One of the studies, conducted in 2016, examined the everyday experiences of 30 black African immigrants in Australia, with a particular focus on the impact of racialised identity constructions on their lives in Southeast Queensland (Udah, 2016). Many of the participants suggested that their sense of belonging was shaped by discursive and ideological notions of race, culture, and difference (Udah, 2018; Udah & Singh, 2019). The study provided further insights and motivation to explore the experiences of international students, in light of the ongoing colonial power dynamics that persistently categorise, disenfranchise, and marginalise them (Udah, 2019, 2021b; Udah et al., 2024). The research with international students, conducted in 2021, examined their wellbeing. Like the 2016 study, the empirical investigation utilised both qualitative (interview) and quantitative (survey) methods of data collection (Udah & Francis, 2022).

In both studies, standard scholarly research approaches were used. There was no attempt to decolonise nor conduct research differently. The format of the interviews and surveys did not allow for multilingual participants. Many of the participants (98%) reported English as their second language. While the studies were conducted in ways that were respectful

and in solidarity with the participants, the influences of personal beliefs and actions were never questioned. The approach was more extractive, viewing participants as data mines for extraction and problems to be understood and solved. This extractive model focused more on obtaining publications (Gaudry, 2011; Mbembe, 2016; Tynan, 2021). In hindsight, this perpetuated colonial logics and dynamics in both studies.

Lessons learned from the two studies highlight the importance of grounding research in practices of solidarity and emancipation, uncovering the possibilities of relational, transitive, and creative solidarity (Bajaj, 2022). Research should be liberatory, characterised by abiding curiosity, careful deep listening, and a quest for self-knowledge and justice (Castillo, 2023). While research participants may come from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, it is crucial to adopt a less extractive and more relational approach.

Participants are not merely sources of empirical data but humans to be humanised. Throughout the fieldwork, many participants openly shared deeply personal narratives that held significant meaning for them. While their accounts enriched the understanding of the issues addressed, a more effective approach would have involved standing in solidarity with them and recognising them as experts rather than data mines for extraction. The studies adopted a colonial approach, focusing solely on data collection for publication without acknowledging varying power relations. These experiences underscore the need to recognise research participants as experts, framing interview questions accordingly, and ensuring that questions are tailored to reflect their expertise (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). The focus should be on their knowledge rather than framing them as victims or witnesses.

In the context of decoloniality, there is a need to rethink how participants are seen, recruited, and worked with, including how knowledge is valued and responsibilities for research participants are taken, which are integral to decolonising research (Datta, 2018; Smith, 2012). A key lesson learned is the ethical duty to challenge ongoing colonialism, shifting the focus from viewing participants as subjects or data mines to recognising them as experts and active contributors to knowledge and theory generation. Undoubtedly, the research studies have highlighted that “self-reflection assists in the maintenance of critical theory principles, as its purpose is to expose the researchers’ personal constructions of the world, their values, beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses that mould the research journey and the choices made” (Hardcastle et al., 2006, p. 158). The challenge now is to integrate the knowledge and insights gained from these studies and conduct research differently.

### Practical Ways for Decolonial Research

Drawing upon the lessons learned and inspirations from defiant scholars, it is important to reimagine research and embrace decolonial research approaches. Decolonial research

practice can contribute to epistemic justice by legitimising othered ways of knowing. However, colonial research practice has played an instrumental role in the ways in which research with marginalised and oppressed groups are conducted, often employing non-relational, exploitative, and extractive ways by “using strict time frames, restrictive academic writing styles, hierarchical notions of expertise and colonial discourses of ‘discovery’, ‘finding the gap’ and ‘collecting data’” (Tynan, 2021, p. 599). The problem of coloniality in research is that research practice is dominated by the methodologies established and enforced by Western ways of being, doing, knowing, and relating (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). This imposition has led to a corresponding marginalisation and erasure of other (ed) ways of knowing the world. In many ways, this imposition of colonial methodologies and hierarchical relationships of rule in research contributes to, and reproduces, epistemic violence and injustice (Datta, 2018). Given the imposition of Western epistemologies and methodologies, some research frameworks still carry the unspoken yet somehow tangible oppressive effect of epistemological, and methodological hierarchy (Udah, 2023a). Hence, decolonisation offers opportunities to do research differently and apply varied research methods and paradigms (Daley & Murrey, 2022). Therefore, drawing upon theories of decolonisation, lessons from research studies, and influences from many defiant scholars, the following are proposed as practical ways for researchers to inform anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive decolonial research practice:

### *Engage in More Flexible Research Practices*

As researchers, we often use standard research methodologies and methods, which are shaped within a context of power and Western dominant theories, and paradigms for dealing with research participants and data collection. For example, traditional qualitative research methods often involve semi-structured interviews in controlled settings that do not reflect the realities of either the researcher’s or the participant’s life. However, a decolonial research approach allows both researcher and participant to engage in more flexible and fluid research practices, granting the researcher together with research participants access to a wider range of knowledge-gathering methods. In fact, a decolonial approach challenges the rigidity of traditional research settings, allowing more flexibility so researchers and participants can co-create knowledge in environments that reflect their real-life experiences.

### *Engage in Critical Self-Reflection and Reflexivity*

Researchers often operate under a set of assumptions, ideologies, and worldviews shaped within a context of power and Western dominant theories and paradigms for addressing research and practice challenges. In this sense, decolonising research involves engagement in critical self-reflection and

reflexivity, which, according to Castillo (2023), encompasses “the praxis of *thought-action-reflection-action* regarding one’s positionality, place of enunciation, privileges, and biases as well as responsibilities and accountabilities during and after research – that is, in all acts of representation and engagement” (p. 24). Conducting decolonial research requires constant reflection on how beliefs, epistemological assumptions, motivations, values, methods, and approaches influence research practice (Smith, 2012) and marginalise other ways of knowing. It is also important to examine the origins of knowledge production, who produces it, and how it is informed, as these factors impact the framing of research problems and interventions. Maintaining epistemic humility is crucial in this process.

Engaging in deep critical reflexivity is a key approach to ethical practice in decolonising research. It requires researchers to adopt a learner’s mindset and view research participants as experts of their lived experiences rather than as victims or witnesses (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). This process of thinking, acting, reflecting, and re-acting enables researchers to critically assess the definitions of themselves, their work, and what is appropriate in their actions and words. It helps researchers develop ways to work with and alongside participants, rather than speaking on their behalf or about them. For example, applying critical reflection may involve integrating a feedback processes and dialogue into research design, reflecting on and challenging complicity in coloniality, and embracing epistemic humility and the inherent discomfort in this process (Castillo, 2023). Engaging in critical reflexivity allows researchers to act ethically, understand, challenge, unearth dominant epistemological assumptions and accept responsibility. Researchers who engage in critical reflexivity are more likely to clarify their actions, scrutinise their biases, and comprehend how coloniality influences their research practices and relationships. Therefore, it is essential to reframe research questions to be appropriately directed toward experts rather than victims. Sometimes, research questions can inadvertently reproduce colonised and Western-centric influences.

### *Recognise Alternative Ways of Knowing*

The recognition of diverse other (ed) ways of knowing has serious implications for research. It requires actively working to amplify historically marginalised and silenced voices and challenging dominant paradigms in research. Often, knowledge construction is informed by Western and Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies that view knowledge as empirical, objective, and connected to the mind (Tynan, 2021). Researchers need to examine how their worldviews are influenced by dominant paradigms and shaped by colonial ideologies of Western research (Smith, 2012; Udah, 2023a).

Given that research may involve working across cultures, cultural sensitivity alone is insufficient. Cultural humility is also necessary to understand and know the culture and

population under study, who are likely to have different identities, norms, cultures, languages, and lived experiences, requiring new approaches to research. When conducting research, it is essential to address important epistemological questions relevant to participants' issues and experiences, build cultural understanding, and shed light on the complex nature of their experiences and nuanced subjectivity. This highlights the importance of utilising cultural brokers or insiders familiar with the study population's culture to promote understanding of other (ed) perspectives (Datta, 2018).

### *Work in Collaborations and Develop Relations of Accountability*

Decolonial research practices encourage collaborations (Smith, 2012), requiring researchers to work collaboratively with research participants and develop relations of accountability (Tynan, 2021). Reciprocity within research relationships should be enabled, prioritising the wellbeing of research participants over research and career promotion objectives (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). To address the extractive nature of research practices, adopting a relational ethos is important, which emphasises principles such as benefit sharing, collaborative authorship, and considerations of who holds the authority to share stories (Tynan, 2021). Striving for non-exploitative and non-extractive knowledge production grounded in reciprocal and relational principles is essential. This approach goes beyond merely reporting back to research participants (Smith, 2012). Akena (2012) explains that the dynamic relationship between researchers and their participants and communities influences what is considered legitimate knowledge within non-Western contexts. Indeed, restoring power and agency to participants involves conducting research that reflects their lived experiences and adopting a less extractive, more relational approach of sharing, co-designing, and co-authorship (Tynan, 2021).

### *Rehumanise and Make Decolonising Research Possible*

Maldonado-Torres (2016) explains that decolonisation efforts aim to rehumanise the world by dismantling hierarchies of difference that dehumanise research participants. These efforts also strive to generate alternative discourses, knowledges, and practices that recognise other forms of knowing and being in the world. For researchers committed to social justice work with oppressed people at the margins, the goal should be to work in solidarity with them, conducting research that humanises and centres them, amplifies their voices, and highlights their perspectives and experiences. Humanising research participants within the matrix of relatedness is more productive than doing so outside it. As Udah (2021b) notes, humanising research participants changes how they are perceived and how their issues are conceptualised. Recognising

participants as individuals with diverse experiences, knowledge, and skills, regardless of limitations, can profoundly influence research approaches and outcomes (Udah, 2023a). Making decolonising research possible, therefore, demands a commitment to a human rights-based approach and the promotion of more inclusive conceptions of human rights. Achieving this requires active dialogue, engagement with, and genuine consideration of the epistemic and cultural perspectives of research participants.

### **Implications: Ethical Imperatives and Decolonial Framework for Research**

Decolonising research is deeply concerned with transformation. As researchers, we have a responsibility to create spaces for transformative praxis. Freire (1970) defines praxis as "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed" (p. 126). It is a transformative praxis to engage in research grounded on critical reflexivity, reflection, collaboration, relationality, and reciprocity. Decolonial praxis offers a pathway to reconceptualise, reimagine and reform research in a manner that is rehumanising and redistributive to address colonial violence, continuities and power dynamics (Pattathu, 2023).

As researchers for anti-racist, anti-oppressive and anti-colonial practice, it is essential to actively interrogate dominant colonial values, theories, standpoints, and structures that influence and shape research (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). We have ethical responsibilities for the knowledge we generate and the methods we use when we do research or work with marginalised and oppressed groups. It is crucial to work respectfully with research participants, protect them from colonial mentalities, reframe counterproductive narratives, reject deficit discourses, and integrate other (ed) perspectives (Dutta, 2023; Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Udah, 2023c). If research does not bring about change for the people involved, then it has not been done correctly. Research should be conducted in solidarity with the marginalised and oppressed, supporting their everyday struggle against ongoing coloniality. Decolonial research seeks to address ongoing dominance of Western and Eurocentric knowledge systems that marginalise and delegitimise other forms of knowledge.

To counter coloniality, it is necessary to adopt a decolonial framework within research that is anti-racist and to work from the traditions of defiant scholarship while building on decolonial epistemes (Daley & Murrey, 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Hence, decolonising research involves actively working against colonial structures of knowledge and power, following anti-racist, praxis-driven scholarship to achieve epistemic justice and epistemological freedom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Adopting a decolonial, defiant, and anti-racist framework demands delinking and a willingness to embrace alternative ways of knowing, doing, and being beyond coloniality in a praxis of solidarity and social justice.

Hence, there is a need to develop research that aligns with decolonial transformative praxis. Many defiant, disobedient and decolonial scholars emphasise the importance of consistently questioning the purpose behind research practice (Castillo, 2023; Daley & Murrey, 2022; Gatwiri et al., 2023; Smith, 2012). They advocate for a commitment to ethical collaboration and accountability in conducting research, ensuring it is rooted in relationality and actively shares knowledge among research participants and their communities. This necessitates examining Western paradigms embedded in research and knowledge production and exploring the ethical implications of coloniality in research practices. In other words, decolonising research *begins with us* and *our commitment* to the people we work with to create socially just empowering, and transformative practices.

Thus, there is a need to take responsibility, address power relations, and adopt decolonial approaches in research. As Tuck and Yang (2014) explain, decolonising research is more about the praxis than the deconstruction of paradigms. It is about the spaces that make decolonising research possible and less about the struggle for method (Zavala, 2013). It works toward strategies that prevent colonial continuities and complicities and their perpetuation in the ways research is practiced, exercised and taught (Pattathu, 2023). Therefore, it is imperative to ground research ethics in positionality, relationality, and accountability with the goal of changing colonial thinking and structures that produce inequality.

While dominant Western paradigms still influence discourse and hold the power to legitimise what is deemed knowledge, moving towards decolonising research necessitates unlearning values associated with dominant colonial paradigms, centring the perspectives and voices of marginalised groups, and promoting participatory parity (Kerfoot & Bello-Nonjengele, 2023). This supports Thambinathan and Kinsella's (2021) assertion that decolonising research necessitates cultivating an ecology of knowledges, acknowledging epistemological diversity, and redistributing power to non-Eurocentric forms of wisdom, especially amplifying voices that have historically and continue to be oppressed. The goal of decolonial research is to recognise alternative ways of being and knowing (Smith, 2012) instead of relying on Eurocentric and Western ways of knowing, doing, and being.

Within research context, decoloniality finds true significance in praxis grounded in practical concrete struggles for justice and liberation (Dutta, 2023). Research informed by critical reflexivity enables researchers to address power dynamics between researchers and participants, creating spaces for transformative praxis (Castillo, 2023). Engaging in deep critical reflexivity helps researchers to recognise and problematise routine abuses of power (Udah, 2021b) and reflect on the implications of the knowledge they generate, including the dynamics of authorship and ownership, as well as the methods and dissemination of that knowledge. It allows researchers to critically examine their privilege in interpreting and theorising, as well as in serving as the sole arbiters of decisions

(Castillo, 2023), thereby preventing the reduction of research participants to mere sources of empirical data who are deemed incapable of generating knowledge and theory (Perera et al., 2022). In other words, we must critically examine the link between scholarship, race, and power because research is always “an epistemological, political, and ethical endeavour” (Castillo, 2023, p. 23).

In a decolonial approach, therefore, it is important to include the knowledge and ways of knowing of research participants and recognise on equal terms diverse knowledges and alternative methods developed in the Global South and by other historically marginalised groups as legitimate. There is also a need to challenge and/or abandon certain dominant assumptions and frameworks, decentre Western and Eurocentric values, methodologies, and paradigms embedded in research practices, and centre the epistemological perspectives and voices of historically marginalised and oppressed groups in efforts to achieve social justice. From the conception to the end, research design must be driven by the desire for social justice and collective ownership. It should also be culturally appropriate and value respect for self-determination in ways that achieve justice and empower research participants (Tynan, 2021).

More importantly, it needs to be anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive. As Castillo (2023) explains, decolonial research is and must be “about justice, solidarity, undoing the coloniality of power, knowledge and being that continues to shape research” (p. 25). This may involve mirror holding by actively listening, learning from research participants, and making their views larger instead of telling them what to see. It may also involve open dialogue to build a trusting relationship with them. Hence, it is imperative that research aligns with decolonial principles, emphasising collaboration, respect for self-determination, and reciprocity. As researchers, our goal becomes, then, to reimagine and do research differently, using anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-oppressive, culturally appropriate, human right-based and decolonised lenses to challenge the epistemic legacy of colonisation, and insidious forms of epistemic injustice and oppression, as well as explore possibilities for building a more just, inclusive world.

## Conclusion

Decolonial movements draw our attention to global inequalities in knowledge production, stemming from the enduring legacies of colonialism. They also highlight the urgency to think, unlearn and relearn as a form of defiance (Daley & Murrey, 2022), attending to the problems of rejection, negation, and silencing, which perpetuate coloniality in research.

Decolonising research is important in research. It is anti-racist, anti-colonial and anti-oppressive. It is driven by the desire for social justice. As researchers, we need to critically reimagine and rethink research through the lens of our own experiences of marginalisation in the context of hegemonic dominance, considering their profound impacts on research participants'

experience and wellbeing. We need to break through our limited perspectives based on, and rooted in, Western and Eurocentric perspectives and engage in innovative and decolonising research. We can begin by liberating our minds from the shackles of colonialism, Whiteness and imperialism. Failing to do this can perpetuate internalised colonialism, hindering our ability to challenge the passive acceptance, colonisation, and marginalisation of other (ed) ways of knowing and being. Embracing a decolonising stance necessitates a readiness to scrutinise colonial legacies, reshape and transform colonised views and perceptions of research participants, and engage in meaningful dialogue with marginalised and non-Western ways of knowing and doing. In fact, a commitment to decolonise our minds as researchers is a vital part of a praxis rooted in solidarity and the pursuit of social justice.

The ethical imperatives of researchers committed to doing decolonial research demand more than recognising unequal power distribution, but also necessitate a commitment to critical reflection, and to challenge colonial assumptions. More importantly, researchers need to rely on accurate narratives, listen and champion the voices of marginalised groups and adopt anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive practices. By employing decolonial frameworks, researchers can reflect on their biases, intentions, and methodologies, while also acknowledging and integrating alternative forms of knowledge. Over time, they can dismantle or bridge oppressive practices. In fact, transformation can only start to be imagined when researchers acknowledge the ongoing violence and effects of colonialism in research practice and examine the ways that the colonial process continues to marginalise other (ed) ways of knowing and doing. Research participants are not people to be defined or problems to be described but people to be listened to, understood, and learned from. Rethinking how we construct, produce, and value knowledge is essential for decolonising research.

Incremental works of decolonising research, whether through critical self-reflection, holding a mirror to others, directly challenging Western paradigms, consciously decentring Western methodologies, or respectfully recognising other (ed) ways of knowing and alternative methods, holds significant meaning and importance. In the pursuit of decolonial research, there is a need to work from defiant scholarship, while also drawing upon anti-racist, anti-colonial and anti-oppressive, and human rights approaches. To maintain meaningful, relevant, ethical, and respectful research that has the potential for transformation, researchers must engage in self-reflection, and explore alternative ways of responding to research problems. This entails doing research differently by actively dialoguing with and valuing the epistemic and cultural perspectives of Indigenous and African people from the Global South.

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### ORCID iD

Hyacinth Udah  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2681-5596>

### Notes

1. Settler colonialism is distinct from other forms of colonialism. It involves elimination of Indigenous people from colonised lands through forced relocation, genocide, and forced assimilation.
2. Global South refers not only to spaces and people, but also poor regions or nations outside Europe and North America, which are commonly categorised to as developing countries and predominantly (though not exclusively) characterised by low-income levels. These regions are often politically or culturally marginalised. The term, Global South, signifies a transition from an emphasis on development or cultural divergence to a focus on geopolitical power dynamics. Many people in the Global South, for example Africa, Asia, South America, and Oceania, continue to suffer from colonialism and be marginalised and silenced in the Global North.

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