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Instead of the linearity, we need a broad, flexible, totally dynamic multiversum, a continuous and frequently linked counterpoint with historical voices. In this way, and to do justice to the gigantic extra-European material, it is no longer possible to work linearly, without sinuosity, in series (order), without a complex and new variety of time (...) Thus, we need a framework of a philosophy of the history of non-European cultures.

Bloch, E. (1970/1955) 'Differentiations in the concept of progress', in Bloch E. *A philosophy for the future,* New York: Herder and Herder: p. 143.

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WORKING Paper, No 03/2023

Dialogue with my selves: de/colonising knowledge and research methodologies

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Decolonising Knowledge in Teaching, Research and Practice

Multiversum

Working Paper No. 03– July 2023

Dialogue with my selves: de/colonising knowledge and research methodologies

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Abstract: This paper aims to discuss conflicts I experience in being a decolonial researcher and a white female academic educated through and operating in a university in the Global North. Principally, the conflicts attend to the reproduction of epistemic injustices related to colonial legacies in western research traditions. The paper initially addresses apprehensions and tensions inherent in decolonising projects emerging within university knowledge production practices, particularly with regard to research methodologies, then considers issues around delinking from them. I work with Fricker's (2007) theory of epistemic injustice, particularly hermeneutic injustice, interweaving scholarship from the global south to set out my understanding(s) about il/legitimacy of research methodologies, and consider the implications for educational research, and researchers, who embrace/struggle with decolonising knowledge. I draw on my own experiences of the tensions in adopting a decolonising research agenda and use the device of duo-ethnographic dialogue to illustrate each 'side' of my experience. This method makes visible some struggles I experience in trying to decolonise knowledge. It also demonstrates a method which deliberately tries to de-link from the colonial legacy of scientific methods that prize parsimonious consensus and which emerged from a Eurocentred, white, male tradition of scientific knowledge production.

Key words: methodological decolonisation; coloniality; epistemic justice; duo-ethnography; education; positionality; struggle

Bio *Shona McIntosh* (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Education at the University of Bath. Her research interests focus on methodologies for epistemic justice in the fields of educative practice and global citizenship education. She is collaborating on projects working in emergent third spaces at the intersection of hegemonic and collective knowledge in educational practice. Her interest in the inter-relationship between learning, power and historical, socio-cultural activity is fundamental to her work to date, and has been used to address problems internationally faced by education professionals and adolescents in schools as well as by community groups. ORCiD: 0000-0002-9223-3949

Dialogue with my selves

de/colonising knowledge and research methodologies

Jane: *I'm not sure writing this working paper is a good idea; I've been told it won't be counted as a REF submission.*
Seònaid: *Me too. But is that a reason for not doing it? I think it is risky because I don't really know if I am in a position to speak about decolonising anything.*
Jane: *A lot of people are talking about decolonising knowledge and the university now; it might lead to interesting research projects and collaborations.*
Seònaid: *I agree there is a lot of talk about decolonising, though maybe less doing! Maybe that is because we work in universities that hold power to create knowledge.*
Jane: *We need to produce reputable and credible research findings that use trusted research methods.*
Seònaid: *But those research methods originate in a colonial view of knowing the world; who gets to occupy the position as credible knowers?*
Jane: *As educational researchers, we have the credibility to recommend changes for the better.*
Seònaid: *Change is the right word; decolonising methodologies may make space for new perspectives and groups to work together in ways that offer alternative ideas for a better, more just future.*
Jane: *Hmm. Perhaps. Maybe we should talk through these tensions together.*

PART 1:

Apprehensions and tensions in decolonial scholarship from the Global North

What can usefully be done to decolonise any aspects of universities by those who are from countries who were colonisers? I came across the question in an address given by Nemequene Tundama (2016) entitled *You cannot decolonize colonialism.* His powerful statement is critical to engage with for anybody working towards decolonisation in universities, not just scholars in the Global North. It is critical because it signals dangerous territory and the risk of appropriation of the project of decolonisation by those who occupy positions of privilege. By privileged positions, I mean those who occupy places in "western-styled" universities, wherever their geographical location (Santos, 2018). Systems like global rankings and financial resourcing mean that universities in the Global North remain privileged whilst universities in the Global South, with fewer resources to compete, are still subject to the same

conditions and values, regardless of the physical location of the university. The western university, underpinned by capitalism, produced social elites, even in societies where "non-Eurocentric cultures are paramount but where, nonetheless the Eurocentric Western-centric university dominates" (Santos, 2018, p. 272-273). Around the world, academics in universities are, therefore, working, albeit unequally, within capitalist and colonial systems of knowledge production. Such people, myself included, are privileged to be relatively free of epistemic constraints about what topics to pursue, even choosing to work against – albeit within – hegemonic, capitalist systems of epistemic dominance. Failure to recognise that any efforts to decolonise are a form of privilege enmeshed in repressive systems that maintain power in the hands of the powerful is to find ways to live with the elephant in the room (Yende, 2020) and, consequently, to live with limitations on the extent of social change that can be effected through university research. But acknowledging the elephant takes one off the beaten track of comfortable research and knowledge traditions, straying from widely understood motivations for one's own career advancement.

A related point, both to the question from Tundama (2016) and concerns around the motivations of those undertaking decolonisation projects within universities, is an underlying apprehension about the relationship between change and research. If we accept that universities are institutional manifestations of colonial knowledge (Santos, 2018) and partly responsible for global exportation of a Euro-centred, rationale scientific subject (St. Pierre, 2021), we must engage with the idea that notions of decolonisation that are possible in the minds of university-trained academics are enmeshed in colonial thought. Such a colonisation of the mind (Wa Thiong'o, 1986) refers to the effect of being educated in and through institutions with a colonial origin.

In the context of the suppression of indigenous languages by the British in Kenya, Wa Thiong'o (1986) explains that the aim of colonialism was controlling the means of production and dominating the mental universe of the colonised. This colonisation of the mind that Wa Thiong'o (1986) outlines was central to a process of epistemic erosion. The process engendered a devaluation of pre-colonial Kenyan knowledge and the gradual alienation of Kenyan people from their histories, cultures and social environment and, eventually, from themselves. Oral traditions and practices of preserving knowledge were gradually undermined, then marginalised and silenced, as the knowledge of the colonisers was privileged. The consequences of this process of epistemic hierarchization can be considered to create the systemic conditions for *hermeneutical injustice* (Fricker, 2007). This term

conceptualizes societal conditions that confer power on some to influence which practices and meanings matter most and is centrally concerned with the consequences for epistemology. Fricker (2007) points out that within these systems of power individual knowers speaking about their experiences are heard differently, and prejudices in hearers mean that some knowers' accounts – or testimonies – are given less credence than others, by the hearers. Such testimonial injustices are committed within systems of hermeneutical injustice. While the systems can be societal, institutions, such as universities, are arguably central in knowledge production processes and so contribute to reproducing the conditions of epistemic injustice at both the systemic and individual scale that Fricker (2007) outlines.

To understand epistemic injustice in the context of Tundame's challenging question, it is helpful to combine Wa Thiong'o and Fricker's concepts with a third: modernity/coloniality (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). Modernity/coloniality conceives of the world we live in today as constituted in and through the process of European colonisation. Consequently, social practices that recreate injustices established under colonisation are evident today, despite political decolonisation in and around the second world war. The colonial processes of epistemic injustice emerge from mental hierarchization, bringing into being a world which positions some human being as exceptional and inculcates an incorrect and damaging acceptance that this is somehow the natural order of humanity (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Without conscious awareness that any form of hierarchy is socially constructed, we risk reproducing the false realities that flourish under epistemic injustice. Following the elements of Quijano's (1992) colonial matrix of power, the racialized hierarchies identified by Fanon (2001), and the oppression of women and the plundering of land, colonial thinking accepts as natural the tripartite domination over race, gender and land. Social hierarchies and related knowledge inequalities that are underpinned by this acceptance include western universities. Universities are where colonial thinking influences the formation of minds shaped by the priorities and values that began over five centuries ago with the advent of a new form of colonisation. The consequence is that powerful knowledge production processes undertaken through research in universities privilege some knowledges – and knowers - over others. Central to this epistemic privileging are the methodological approaches undertaken by university researchers that traces Eurocentred, colonial ways of measuring the world (Smith, 2012) to the practices that underpin the social sciences used by academics today (McIntosh and Wilder, 2022). Given this argument, it may seem futile for academics to mount any

attempts to actively delink knowledge production from dominant, western ways of understanding the world.

However, I argue that this would be a mistake but add that it is also a mistake to undertake any action towards decolonisation without first identifying one's own position as an agent in (con)forming (to) dominant knowledge through research. Thus, individual motives for decolonising must be examined to foster a respectful awareness of the intellectual territory one is in danger of encroaching, lest one inadvertently ends up reinscribing colonialism (Moosavi, 2020). In essence, the problem this paper addresses is concerned with how to conduct decolonisation – of knowledge – if, as a decolonial researcher, one has never been subject to the oppression of colonisation and, in fact, has been educated within colonial institutions. This is not to overlook the workings of colonialism, such as patriarchy and racism, that persist in the fabric of modern European societies and within which we become human beings. Is it possible to de-link from one's academic training to find ways to do, be and know in a way that creates space for decolonial research? In essence, the problem is whether one can simultaneously embody colonial thinking *and* work to dismantle the systems of epistemic injustice that such thinking creates.

This working paper aims to address that problem by openly acknowledging the existence of this divide, without contriving a consensus of any kind. Rather, it argues that it is imperative to make visible the dualism that, whether consciously or not, must exist in university scholars engaged in post-colonial theories, decolonising work and decolonial thinking and practices. It matters that this dualism is the focus of deep reflexivity and honesty, about oneself, one's methodologies and one's privileged position as an academic knower, because, in critical confrontation and reflection of what is considered a natural arrangement, one can begin to consider alternative ways of doing, being and knowing that delink from those that reproduce epistemic injustices.

The dialogical self

In order to convey something of the dualisms, as I see them, I present this working paper in the form of a dialogue between two parts of myself. One part foregrounds the person whose education and, particularly, academic training in knowledge creation, is firmly rooted in Eurocentric ontology: a view of reality emerging from the colonial era in what was known as the Enlightenment in Europe. The other part is the person who, aware that this ontology marginalises some human beings with the epistemic consequences of devaluing some

knowers and knowledges, wants to delink from the epistemic injustices upheld by traditional social science methodologies, identifying decolonial research as a way to do so. That person will be called Seònaid (pronounced *show-na*), the origins of the Scottish Gaelic version of my given name, Shona. The former person will be named Jane, an Anglicized version of Seònaid and seen in records kept by the English about the Scots in the centuries leading up to the eventual total subsumption of Scotland by England in the eighteenth century.

The choice of dialogue is a deliberate theoretical and methodological one. Firstly, the theoretical rationale of the dialogical self (Hermans, 2001) recognises the conflicting, irresolute, interwoven doings and undoings of thought as humans seek to make sense of their social world and own identities. Secondly, the methodological rationale is to model an alternative to the monologues that prevail in academic texts. Instead I adopt a duo-autoethnography (Whitworth and Wilcoxen, 2019). This method allows exploration of multi-faceted aspects of human existence which may represent incommensurate though contemporaneous positions that exist in one body. This conflict is rarely recognised, preferring to present an academic consensus, regardless of the numbers of authors included, to conclusively present findings that mask any dissent amongst the authors (McIntosh and Lillo Kang, 2023).

Duo-ethnography is helpful as a methodology and coheres with the method of dialogue to set out tensions around engaging in decolonial research. It serves to open up an epistemic space for alternative accounts of reality to emerge without one assuming dominance over the other. It appears in this paper as a dialogue between Jane and Seònaid to deliberately problematise consensus. The dominant academic convention of consensus is problematic in at least three ways relevant to this working paper. First, the convention is instrumental in the construction of knowledge as universal, when it actually centralises dominant knowledge which, as I have argued, has privileged Eurocentred thinking for centuries. Secondly, it appears, in its fixed, published format, to be incontestable, even though it is partial and results from particular methodological approaches to particular problems. And thirdly, it presents research findings as conclusive, disavowing the mobile, contextual, and emergent nature of knowledge created between human beings in social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978).

The central part of the paper is structured as a dialogue between two exaggerated aspects of myself. It is presented as a playscript, with occasional sub-headings, so nuances and complexities about decolonising research can emerge and which may connect with other

researchers' experiences. It was difficult to entirely de-link from the academic convention of acknowledging other scholars' ideas and so, at times, the dialogue includes citations. The dialogue between Jane and Seònaid starts with them introducing themselves and their positions as knowers. The body of the dialogue section then considers two constituent elements of coloniality – hierarchies and dominance – before turning to consider how these concepts play out in universities to create the conditions for hermeneutical injustice that promote certain methodological approaches. The dialogue section ends with consideration of the purpose of research in relation to social change. The paper ends by bringing the two parts of myself together again, to reflect, in prose, on the most pertinent issues raised for scholars in the global north working to decolonise the methods of research and to extend an invitation to readers to reflect on where they see their own positions reflected in the dialogues.

In the following section, the voices of Jane and Seònaid are in debate with each other. Lacking the structural cues of academic text, the 'talk' does not give the reader a sense of what comes next; much like ongoing conversation, the style is informal, and the meaning is emergent. To help readers, I have inserted five guiding sub-headings. *Enough preamble: I invite you to listen in to the musings of my dialogic self.*

PART 2: Meeting my selves

Jane: Hi. Seònaid. I am a senior lecturer in a UK university and my specialist areas of research includes critical global citizenship education, particularly focused on youth climate concerns. The aim of my current project is to contribute to ongoing research into young people's reducing interest in climate action in the early years of secondary school and it was funded by the British Academy.

Seònaid: Hi, Jane. I work in a university too and I'm also interested in young people and the climate. My work takes me out of the university to connect with children and their teachers in schools, as well as with community groups actively working to address climate issues, to understand where children's concerns are being considered.

Jane: It sounds like my area might be of interest to you. I can send you my recent publications. And maybe you would be free to attend a public lecture I am giving next month?

Seònaid: That sounds great, Jane. I'd be so interested in seeing how we are approaching similar-sounding problems. But can I be frank with you?

Jane: Of course. I am keen to have an honest exchange here.

Seònaid: Well, I have to say that in suggesting I engage with your work you are adopting a deliberate position as a knower, and that positions me in relation to you. You are presenting yourself as a person whose knowledge is valuable. And by suggesting that I can learn from you, you are positioning what I know as less informed, even less valuable and, consequently, that what I know, and who I am as a knower, has less credence. That way of talking produces an epistemic hierarchy.

Epistemic hierarchies and dominant knowers

Jane: Well, I am sorry. I didn't mean to make you think I didn't want to hear more about your work.

Seònaid: You could start by reading what I've published.

Jane: OK, OK! But aren't you just doing the same hierarchical positioning now?

Seònaid: I suppose so. It really is hard to get away from that sort of signalling in higher education, where everyone seems anxious to show that they have published outputs as some sort of validation. But are publications so relevant in our research area? What do children and teachers care about our publications?

Jane: Their learning is important; they won't read papers but maybe someone will make a policy change based on what we have written. That way their learning can be shaped by the knowledge we have created.

Seònaid: Maybe. Rarely. But do we value what children know? Do we see them as knowers or only learners? They are a key part that informs production of knowledge in educational research.

Jane: Children's knowledge needs to be valued in educational research, I agree. And it is so important for them to know more about the climate, for instance, especially since young people are going to inherit the issues their predecessors have created.

Seònaid: Don't they need more than just *knowing* about the climate? Major societal changes are required to avert the climate emergency and, given that the problems are those of future generations to solve, don't we have to centralise the concerns of young people?

Jane: Oh, you mean using the child's voice in research? Interesting, yes, but could young people really add much? I mean, it takes highly specialised knowledge about climate change to understand the issues, right? Scientific knowledge is needed to find ways to measure and reduce carbon output, for instance, or find alternatives to single-use plastics. So, I reckon educational policymakers and senior leaders in schools would be best placed to take some of the advances in those fields and present the knowledge to school children.

Seònaid: What I'm hearing you say is that you think that there are researchers with specific knowledge about climate issues and that there are people in education who reformulate that knowledge for kids. Right?

Jane: Well, I don't think it is a linear process, but what you say does show where educational researchers fit in. We work to 'translate' that specialist scientific knowledge into educational contexts, like curricular content.

Seònaid: You describe a top-down model of knowledge production, with climatologists, for instance, as the source of specialised 'knowledge' and the people, in education in this case, framed as recipients of knowledge produced by others. And the students disappear altogether. It's a very hierarchical way of describing knowledge, isn't it?

Jane: Well, I did say it wasn't a linear process. But you have to accept that we have universities so that people can hone their expertise in a field. That is how human knowledge advances. We can't expect non-specialists to understand what a scientist has been working on for their whole career, can we?

Seònaid: We can't, no; not even the educational researchers who have to 'translate' it. I couldn't do that. But universities are not value- or history-free; their existence derives from Eurocentred notions of knowledge and knowing that feed into societal hierarchies and perpetuate the legacy of colonialism (Santos, 2010). Universities 'train' people all round the world to value this way of seeing the world, and those people may have jobs with power to shape things like curricula.

Jane: But curriculum content is only one way of gaining knowledge, right? There are experiential and folk knowledges too. And we use them all the time in social sciences – the knowledge of our participants. The knowledge of participants is really important to value. But saying we 'use' people sounds very transactional. After all, without their perspectives, there would be no social science (Limes-Taylor Henderson and Esposito, 2019).

Seònaid: But it also reinforces that knowledge hierarchy which positions university (by which I mean Eurocentred) knowledge as superior.

Jane: I said specialised, not superior.

Seònaid: Is there a difference?

Jane: Well, think about qualitative research where participants' contributions are central to the conclusions presented.

Seònaid: I know that is what is supposed to happen, but I struggle with that, especially in short publications when participants' lives and views are whittled down to a few quotations.

Jane: But publications aren't trying to represent a full life, are they? All knowledge is partial. And any quotes we use are there as evidence of the claims we are making. They are pivotal to any educational inquiry. We need them; that is why it is so important to recognise their input and deal with them in an ethical way throughout the research process. Valuing participants was central to the way I was trained to do research.

Coloniality, power and knowledge

Seònaid: Me too but I'm coming to see ethics procedures as part of the surveillance mode of the western, managerialist higher education system (Sikes and Piper, 2010). It is part of the dominant apparatus, 'the organizing logic and a modality of knowledge, power, and being—that is, coloniality' (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 12).

Jane: What do you mean 'coloniality'? Colonialism ended last century when so many countries chose independence.

Seònaid: Political independence of previously colonised societies is different from the concept of coloniality, which is inherent to modern life. There is the view that:

> the project of Western modernity as a whole is inherently a colonial one and that many of the ideas and practices that are part of it, including some of the ones that are central to contemporary views of knowledge, good manners, state formation, and education, are entangled with and can easily reproduce coloniality' (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 12).

This perspective requires us to recognize where we are in history as part of an unfolding social process that began centuries ago with European, colonial expansion, what Mignolo and Walsh (2018) call modernity/coloniality.

Jane: I don't disagree with that conceptualisation, but I do doubt the extent of its explanatory power. Doesn't it rather overlook other historical influences, before European empire building, like those in the Far East, and even the Ottoman Empire?

Seònaid: Empires of domination are different from the European empires of conquest and extraction; the former type emerges in moves by indigenous rulers and spark political and administrative systems of government over a defined territory whereas empires of conquest operate at a distance, subjugate populations deemed inferior through categorisation by race or religion without including them in government, and extracting for the colonists the wealth of the conquered lands (Bhambra and Holmwood (2021).I think that the dominance of Eurocenterd power, and its longevity, means that those earlier empires found their relevance was diminishing as Europe turned to the West, away from the East.

Jane: So, what you are saying is that the drive to conquest established an over-arching agenda that was informed by the European perspective?

Seònaid: That is right and finds its expression today in capitalist agendas seeking control of planetary resources. What we are talking about has implications for the work we do as researchers in the Global north. Especially for the knowledge we are creating, and the questions we are addressing.

Jane: The research questions, the problems we see in education are often theorised from sociological standpoints and so those structural inequalities can be recognised and,

through deliberative and considered analysis, the points where injustices emerge can become the focus for educational research (Giroux, 2011).

Seònaid: There is plenty of sociological theorisation, but it speaks to and about the Global North, almost without exceptions (Connell, 2007).

Jane: Well, some social theory is better than none, isn't it? Anyway, aren't the ideas you are talking about social theories too? How are theories from the Global South any different?

Hermeneutical injustice and scientific knowledge

Seònaid: Social theory from the Global South occupies a place in the colonial hierarchy of knowledge and suffers from hermeneutical conditions which allow those in the Global North to perceive it as inferior.

Jane: Hermeneutic injustice is a reference to Fricker's (2007) theory of epistemic injustice, isn't it? Where broad social conditions make it possible for knowers – people with knowledge – to be positioned unequally, and for what they say to be valued differently, depending on who is hearing them.

Seònaid: Right. I think, when talking about educational research, Fricker's (2007) concepts about epistemological inequalities resonate, for me, with conceptions of hierarchies and epistemic marginalisation, silencing and erasure that I read about in the work of decolonial scholars.

Jane: Don't we try to avoid that in the way we conduct our research? You know, through the ethics processes we follow.

Seònaid: Ethics processes are definitely important in research, but institutional ethics are very Eurocentred and, it has been pointed out, have a Western perspective that is not suited to every context. Oyinloye (2021) found that the ethical guidelines she adhered to in her western university context had limited meaning in her field work with rural Yorùbá in Northcentral Nigeria. Nevertheless, there were certain aspects of western ethics that mapped onto an Ọmọlúàbí moral-ethical approach that allowed her to integrate Ọmọlúàbí principles under a framework of continuity, adherence to local

and national processes, adaptation to local ways of being and doing and provision of tangible benefit (Oyinloye, 2021).

Jane: There is a risk, then, that even ethically-sound research will reinforce Western ideas of what matters. Because research ethics come from a colonial history that promotes Eurocentred concerns?

Seònaid: Right and, by extension, we must consider that the entire social activity of knowledge production is driven by Eurocentred values to position those values and practices as superior – exceptional, as Smith (2012) says – to non-European ways of knowing.

Jane: Ah. Well. I have to say that view concerns me. You are not really suggesting that you can apply that to the whole of modern science, are you? What would we be left with if we were to reject it? I mean, science has helped humanity to achieve so much, through the development of mathematics, physics, neuroscience.

Seònaid: Agreed. Of course, but you must concede that the cross-section of humanity that benefit most from those examples of knowledge advances tend to be the global minority: those who live in the Global North. It is no coincidence that the economic inequalities that position the Western powers as dominant, globally, are also those with a history of colonisation. Scientific knowledge is implicated in these inequalities.

Jane: But a lot of us in Education are already aware of these inequalities and want to end them; that is why we are working in the field. We use our research to shed light on some of the structures that reproduce inequalities, and which make life tougher for some people than others. In my own work, I try always to design my research, whatever the methodological approach I adopt, with the aim of bringing benefit to those who need it most.

Seònaid: What I am hearing in amongst that is the positioning of researchers as benefactors. That positioning creates passivity; it deprives some human beings of agency to improve their own lives. Or at least to suggest that they cannot do it alone. But we can take that issue further if I ask you where those ideas of what to research actually come from.

Colonial legacies and research methodologies

Jane: Well, I start with research questions, as gaps in the existing literature, and then use the method that fits the research questions. I teach that to all my students, from undergraduate to doctoral. I think it has to be like that otherwise you are not really adding anything new. I might see or hear about a problem in practice that sends me into the literature for a scout about to see if there is a gap. If I find one, it's great. I get really excited and start thinking about who to submit a funding bid to. Then it's seeing if there is a methodological gap, like has anyone done a survey of this or are there no qualitative studies of it? For me, the question and the methodology go hand in hand.

Seònaid: I think the questions that are asked are, for me, where epistemic injustice begins. I have been reflecting about how we, as researchers, turn to the published research to identify a 'gap' and how this gap presents concerns as legitimate for inquiry. Take your example about a problem arising in practice. Can that be a starting point without first reviewing the literature?

Jane: Well, yes; there is a long history of PAR (participatory action research) in the social sciences where researchers work with stakeholders to address problems in the community.

Seònaid: And what is the aim of that kind of research? To publish? To achieve social change?

Jane: I think it has to be both. If it is just to publish, you can do that with other methodologies so why do PAR? I don't do it myself, though I think it is great that some people are working that way. I wasn't trained in those methods. And I don't really have the time it takes to invest in community projects.

Seònaid: Hang on; is it research or a community project? It sounds like you started off saying PAR was a legitimate form of enquiry then ended up devaluing it.

Jane: Well, PAR doesn't have a very high standing as a research method, in the same way that some of the tradition methodologies do. Just as the questions that come from communities might not have the same heft behind them as ones that appear in published research. And part of me is agreeing that there is a problem but I am also thinking that community issues do not require the same level of specialist knowledge as scientific problems. Right? People are solving their own problems all the time, just not in ways that are as methodical or robust as scientific inquiries, so can't be generalised and applied to different contexts.

Seònaid: We are straying towards considering the purpose of educational research.

Jane: It is really important; what do you think educational research is for.

Seònaid: It is primarily to understand how education, in many different aspects, can contribute to the development of future societies.

Jane: I agree. But I also think it is about improving education so that children get equal opportunities and go on to live productive and fulfilled lives.

Seònaid: But given what I said earlier about hermeneutic injustice, I don't think we can think about education as existing in a vacuum. We need to recognise the historical and social conditions that make education, in its western-centred form, one of the forces that reproduces inequalities between men and women, boys and girls, white and non-white people; essentially being created in Eurocentred minds, furthering the priorities and values that make sense to white, able-bodied, English-speaking heterosexual men.

Jane: Ok. If that is the case, do we stop doing research? Because in the context of modernity/coloniality, then educational research prioritises the production of knowledge through questions legitimized by published research and that those questions can only be investigated by a few methods which originated in the ways of seeing the world that made sense to the European white men of privilege in the period of 'Enlightenment'!

Seònaid: Exactly!

Research and/or activism

Jane: I'm not sure this makes sense. What other options are there? If you go down the post-qualitative route then that severely limits the journals where you can publish.

Seònaid: What if it's not all about publishing in journals, though? What if you design your research around activist principles?

Jane: Wow. That is really taking a risk, moving away from research solely focused on academic outputs.

Seònaid: Yes. I think that the relationship between research and social change can usefully depart from those confines through a purposeful move towards activism and by more academics than are currently working that way.

Jane: How can research create the social change that activism seeks? Are you talking about participatory action research?

Seònaid: Well, yes, but really I'm thinking about broadening what counts as a 'method' in order to reach different kinds of knowledge.

Jane: Like creative, collaborative, arts-based methods?

Seònaid: Yes. Like the work developing Methods for change at Manchester University (Barron *et al.*, 2021). They start with the aim of developing methods to change problematic social practices. But there are more ways of knowledge making, like films, poetry and performances, where people's ways of knowing the world take centre stage. In addition to methods, we can think about how we can decentre problematic, western traditions by broadening what counts as a legitimate methodology. Santos (2018) advocates the use of art as an interrupter of hegemonic ways of knowing because it allows the expression of suppressed pasts in forms with meanings outside dominant accounts of reality. What if we adopted an emergent ontology (Renold, 2018) so researchers follow where participants' knowledges are going – no, not participants, or co-creators, but (co-) generators of knowledge. If we can do that, it means that a whole range of different methods open up for us. And they can be seen as producing knowledge while engaged in any unstructured activities from daily life, like walking to school, playing games, cooking–

Jane: Wait. Cooking?

Seònaid: Is that a step too far? But why not? If we see the way knowledge creation is enmeshed by systems of hermeneutic injustice, why shouldn't we be prepared to centralise human interaction in social practice?

Jane: But aren't you just describing a focus group? Or an ethnography?

Seònaid: But these words and the activities they lead researchers to perform come from an imperialist epistemology which positions western knowledge as superior (Smith, 2012) and, as a consequence, all other ways of knowing as inferior. Not only that, but

the sheen of elitism remains in the DNA of academia, even ontologically with the researcher as rational subject feigning to work at one remove from the realities of the social lives of people they are 'researching'.

Jane: The ivory tower? OK. But we have moved away from all that you know? Universities have to connect their knowledge with communities and industry–

Seònaid: Oh! that isn't activism. That is feeding potentially profitable ideas to the economic appetite of bandit capitalists.

Jane: Look, I think you are getting a bit polemical about all this, Seònaid. And I'm worried that in advocating these ways of working you, in your dominant and privileged position, are in danger of reinscribing coloniality (Moosavi, 2020).

Seònaid: I'm really conscious of that too. But I want to emphasise what I was trying to say earlier: decolonising methodology doesn't aim to replace one set of dominant ways of doing, being and knowing with another set. I see its key contribution as being to seek out spaces for marginalised accounts of human existence to occupy and for those accounts of struggle against inequality and oppression to be included in our understanding of what it means to live today.

Jane: I think you are ignoring all the good research being done about social inequalities and the role of education in reproducing or alleviating injustice. I can't really accept the totally negative picture you are painting of educational research and I don't think a few kids doing documentaries will change anything substantially.

Seònaid: I think that dismissive tone represents fear: the response identified in the first of Maldonado-Torres' (2016) ten theses, as a reaction to the decolonial agenda. The fear stems from a feeling that all that one was schooled into believing as a natural way of doing things and resulting in a 'natural' world order, is in fact the product of a violent and historical flattening of difference.

Jane: Well, I don't know about violent-

Seònaid: Read Fanon!

Jane: But I don't know how you are going to get very far with this. Isn't it easier to just get on and join in with the way things are rather than try to fight against the grain all the

time? Isn't doing research differently taking a risk with your career? Can you really isolate yourself like that?

Seònaid: But I wouldn't be alone; I'd be following the advances of researchers seeking to decolonise methodologies and to bring activism to the centre of research for social justice.

Jane: It all sounds very noble, but I think you are making life difficult for yourself.

Seònaid: Well, yes; because struggle is difficult. Struggling against domination, oppression and the separation of some human beings as less exceptional than others seems worth taking a risk for.

Jane: OK, you are right, of course. But most of what you have said is about the hermeneutic injustices that we give and receive day in and day out, in our jobs and our lives. What changes can we possibly make that will support that struggle?

Seònaid: We go back to the beginning: who are we? Why are we doing this? What methodologies can we create to de-link from imperialist ontologies? What methods can we accommodate to open epistemically just spaces for new accounts of social reality to inhabit? What is certain is that, to paraphrase Audre Lorde (2017), the tools of a racist, imperialist patriarchy can only build one kind of house; if we want a different house, we need different tools. We have a choice.

PART 3: My reunited selves

In attempting to present two conflicting sides of my understanding of the work of decolonisation, and decolonising methodologies in particular, I have brought onto the page two distinct aspects of my academic persona and humbly, if also nervously, laid them out for the perusal of unknown eyes. Undoubtedly, I can hold both world views in my head and am engaged in a struggle where the reactionary and revolutionary aspirations will, I suspect, never be fully resolved. Where Jane is loyal to the traditions of knowledge production in which she was trained and hopes to retain the privilege that she worked hard to achieve, Seònaid is there to insist that it was not just her own hard work that enabled her to do so: that, just as all white women in western(ised) universities, we are working within the meshes that let us do this because of the imperial fictionalisation of the exceptionalism of whiteness

(Zakaria, 2021). Zakaria makes it clear that the layered inequalities that exclude people of colour from the kind of privilege that white people are often blind to are an injustice that needs to be made visible and undone.

The concept of hermeneutic injustice requires further elucidation, especially in relation to the linked notion of testimonial injustice that Fricker (2007) explains is a wrong done to the speaker, by those who hear them, in pre-judging, down-playing or dismissing the accounts they offer of their lived experience. The powerful idea of epistemic injustice is useful for thinking about the re-enactments we are in danger of making that continue to marginalise, silence or erase non-hegemonic knowledges through the colonial apparatus of social science research. But thinking is not going to be enough to decolonise research methodologies; experimental and innovative approaches are required, that challenge us to reject knowledge, singular, and to hear and give credence to the multiple knowledges that exist in the social world. The challenges are enormous: getting into university, gaining degrees and higher degrees, moving out of precarious employment and into more secure academic positions, finding time to read and write and finding people, with the power to publish, to hear our testimonies in order to find like-minded others. In undergoing that process we develop the Jane within each of us!

Nevertheless, it bears repeating that I must continually be alert to the risk that any decolonising work I do does not reinscribe colonialism by promoting some epistemic positions as more valuable than others. This would essentially be unjust. Instead, I will work in educational research to find methods that make spaces for non-dominant voices and do my best to follow where they lead. The attempt to use dialogue had its drawbacks, such as the pull to comply with my training to cite sources whose ideas I use in my thinking, suggesting that the method is a limited attempt to contribute towards the process of decolonising research methodologies. Tundama (2016), with reference to the western university, argued that you cannot decolonise what has never been colonised, and I agree. I will argue, however, for the capacity of academics with academic freedom to pursue social change, to start with changes closer to themselves, and to find ways to be, know and do research in ways that prioritise methodologies for epistemic justice. -

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