

Using auto-ethnography to bring visibility to coloniality

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journals.sagepub.com/home/qsww**Giovanni Hernandez-Carranza** 

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Abstract

This article traces how coloniality traps research and researchers in the Global North into maintaining the rigidity of its politics and logics through the meaning process. As International Social Work continues to gain popularity, supporting the proliferation of research across borders, the theoretical underpinnings must be unpacked with the context of the collaboration and the cultures involved that give meaning to both. The crux of the article rests within the implications for qualitative research in social work—both within, and across borders as a way of promoting social justice with marginalized communities. It also provides new possibilities for transcending and translating methodologies across the fields of social work and anthropology. To illustrate how research operates under the rubric of coloniality, this article uses autoethnography to uncover the on-the-ground realities of working across localities. The auto-ethnography revealed that despite the goal of sharing control of the research process, tensions related to coloniality emerged. As a result of working in different localities, each team's processes became distinct—as it was informed by different historical, economic and geopolitical processes.

Keywords

Auto-ethnography, Indigenous, colonization, anthropology, International Social Work, Indigenous women

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Social work research that attempts to reveal how coloniality continues to structure oppression is often complicit in rearticulating the logic that supports continued marginalization and exploitation (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). Decolonial work must focus on how these structures operate to understand the colonial conditioning embedded in research, and how they can be undone (Dutta and Basu, 2016). Critiquing these complicities without action falls short of social change. The intention of being socially just associated with decoloniality does not automatically preclude the methods from political and ethical tensions as functions of coloniality in social work research (Williams, 2019). To fully actualize these intentions the methods by which coloniality saturates theory and praxis must be exposed, which includes how the researchers position themselves and are situated within the discourse of research (Dutta and Basu, 2016). How can the logic of coloniality be traced to make visible the ways that it flows through, structures and emerges in the research? What are the unconscious aspects carried within the researchers? Unpacking coloniality as the conditioning phenomena embedded in research implicates the researchers to draw themselves into the critique, while simultaneously examining the larger complex social constellations. The analytic ethnographic paradigm (Anderson, 2006) offers an opportunity to map out the researchers' experiences and sensibilities, in a format that can speak to the on the ground realities of coloniality. The auto-ethnography presented in this article interrogates the experiences of the researchers of and within coloniality in the Global North and the epistemological underpinnings being operated in the Global South. The goal was to turn the critical eye inward, to understand how the structures of coloniality were lived and enacted while trying to work towards the opposite – co-creating knowledge in the margins.

Anthropological methods such as ethnographic work, encourage the mapping of places in the space of social and cultural contexts of a phenomenon (Haight et al., 2014; Witkin, 2014). Ethnographers analyze how complex systems of beliefs and practices operate and become embedded within sociocultural and historical contexts. Auto-ethnography uses personal experience to understand the social phenomena and how one is both, implicated and simultaneously gives the context meaning (Witkin, 2014). Haight et al. (2014) note that the construction of social phenomena, including how people are differently situated within their contexts, is a focus for both anthropology and social work. Auto-ethnography offers significant possibilities in social work research, to challenge, not only its ontology, but ways of being in place and space (Haight, 2018), creating new opportunities for decolonial work. Traversing the methodological boundary into anthropology allows the social work researcher to bring into focus the social and cultural operations of their research, to reveal coloniality's politics and logics. It opens space to understand how beliefs are constructed to imbue 'value' and 'worth' onto identities and relationships which are reified during practice and, in turn, influence the politics and logics of coloniality. Auto-ethnography enables the researcher a critical

vantage point to draw in the personal, including perceptions and field notes, as a political analysis (Chang, 2016).

Using collaborative methods to work across borders between the Global South/North that are built on reciprocity and mutual benefit, can fall into problematic relations—as in the research discussed here. This article does not presume that bridging theories and methodologies between social work and anthropology will fully embrace the decolonial attitude, as the stains of coloniality are everywhere. However, this auto-ethnography presents an opportunity to make the processes of coloniality visible, name them, and identify opportunities for change. This article traces how coloniality traps research and researchers in the Global North into maintaining the rigidity of its politics and logics. As International Social Work continues to gain popularity, supporting the proliferation of research across borders, the theoretical underpinnings must be unpacked with the context of the collaboration and the cultures involved that give meaning to both.

To ground this auto-ethnography the project will be explained, including the framework and methods. The key terms are defined to illuminate the project's goals and theoretical footing. Then, the process of the auto-ethnography will be recounted, and the key insights derived from it. The crux of the article rests within the implications for qualitative research in social work—both within, and across borders as a way of promoting social justice with marginalized communities. It also provides new possibilities for transcending and translating methodologies across the fields of social work and anthropology to work towards decolonization for both disciplines.

Definitions

The project employed methods that opened space for dialogue and reflection with Indigenous Women in [country in South America¹] to support their resistance and activism. Ideally, the process would exalt Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, working towards decolonization by bringing it from the margins to center. Escobar (2010) coined this type of project, one that embraces the decolonial attitude, as the “modernity/coloniality research program” (p. 179). This umbrella term signals a theoretical positioning that challenges the discourses of modernity and coloniality, activating the impetus to “do” decolonial praxis as a method (Escobar, 2010; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018).

The Coloniality of Power (CoP) was the theoretical framework used. CoP is understood as the distribution of power that has maintained relations of exploitation and domination beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of colonialism (Quijano, 2000). This framework posits that race, sex, gender, and capital were invented during the colonial era and used together as tools to colonize the Indigenous Peoples across the lands now known as the Americas (Quijano, 2000). This logic justified the violent dispossession of Indigenous People of their lands. This accumulation was rooted in racialization and domination, which continued to evolve through ‘modernity’, to sustain their subjugation. The CoP moved

beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of colonialism and represents the legacy of the colonial project, as internalized by many people around the globe (Chataika, 2012; Razack, 2002). The subjugated identities and how they are experienced refers to the imaginary global 'colonial grid' that has evolved to categorize people by race, gender, and sexuality and in the process, created a matrix that ascribes people their worth, or lack thereof (Carranza, 2018).

Castro-Klarén (2008), noted that coloniality and modernity have a symbiotic relationship. Modernity is understood as the European epistemological and ontological framework rooted in ideas of newness, rationality, secularism and the glorification of epistemic and economic linear progression that fueled the imperial conquest (Mignolo, 2009). CoP and modernity have maintained the distribution of power based on exploitation and the relations of domination to ensure that race, capital, sex, and gender remain the organizing principles in the globe's economic, social, and political landscapes. These principles undergird the continued use of divisive language that sets up the everchanging power dynamics and binary thinking that support relationships between the Global North and the Global South (El-Lahib, 2015). Its continued hegemony has ensured that coloniality/modernity is everywhere, even in the air we breathe (Castro-Klarén, 2008) and maintains the objectification and devaluation of Indigenous Women's knowledge. This analysis was utilized to provide insight into the contemporary colonial matrix.

The division both geographically and theoretically between the Global South/North underpinned this collaborative work. The Global North then refers to the geographical spaces, social institutions, and social actors that are the drivers of coloniality's politics and logics, which are invested in reaping the benefits of modernity/coloniality's epistemological, ontological, political, economic, social, and cultural dominance (Carranza et al., 2020; Mahler, 2017). By proxy this does not mean the Global South is automatically subjugated into the binary of colonizer/colonized. These countries have histories of uprisings, resistance and social movements against manufactured inequalities. Nor is it a dichotomous relationship. Rather, the Global South refers to the constellation of spaces, social institutions, and social actors that the Global North is dependent upon to maintain their global hegemony. This is maintained through an assemblage of everchanging, complementary, contradictory, uneven, and complex epistemological, ontological, political, economic, social, and cultural processes. These processes are rooted in the politics and logics that emerged from the initial colonial moment that indelibly wounded the Global South to promote economic development (Carranza et al., 2020).

The project

The project was developed from the ground up with grassroots organizations in [Country] and an academic in the Global North. In the initial meetings between the partners in the Global North and South, it was identified that one of the barriers to equality for Indigenous Women was the lack of access to the national and

international spaces and conversations that impacted their lives. It was decided that the project would examine the resiliency and agency of Indigenous Women in [Country] within the context of the current and historical political, social, cultural, and economic exclusion. To facilitate this, the partners would work with Indigenous Women to engage in research that preserved their ancestral knowledge(s) and could amplify their voices to challenge the systemic barriers that structured their marginalization. Qualitative data gathering methods that could advance social justice and were rooted in oral traditions were selected. This combination centered Indigenous ontologies and allow for the preservation of stories, knowledge, ideologies and fables (Hardesty and Gunn, 2019; Williams, 2019). It also expands the capacity for knowledge mobilization to continue after the project has completed (Williams, 2019). The collaborators hoped that the connections made could inform their collective organization and enable them to better formulate, discuss, and define their positions as Indigenous Women after the project was completed. After these discussions, an application for funding in the Global North was completed by the partners. Special attention was given to balancing the needs of the community and collaborators, with the funder's ideologies and requirements. For example, the community needed spaces of open dialogue to work towards resistance and activism that did not add additional labor, such as booking meeting rooms, organizing, and gathering women. The administrative labor would be completed by the team in the Global North to allow the team in the South to engage with Indigenous Women and collect the necessary data.

Funding was secured with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), a subsidiary of the Government of Canada for three-years. The mandate of the funding stream was to develop innovative insights into lesser known areas and, to strengthen community capacity to increase the uptake of knowledge and/or sustain the project. At the time, SSHRC required that the applicant - the University - manage the funds and ensure that each year's benchmarks and outcomes were met. SSHRC strategically funds research initiatives as opposed to program development, advocacy or activism, so the data collection components also needed to feature prominently. Year one included policy and critical discourse analysis, community engagement and meetings with Indigenous communities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The second year involved data collection using learning circles with Indigenous Women, and knowledge mobilization in year three. Throughout the life of the project there was funding to support community engagement and advocacy activities to develop relationships between the partners and Indigenous Women. The funding application required several measurements for success-data management, outcomes, deliverables and knowledge mobilization. The funder and University also required the Principle Investigator (PI) to be accountable for the ethics protocol, which articulated the goals, methods, and provided ethical clearance to collect data with Indigenous women and their communities. This set up, centralized power in the Global North through financial and ethical accountability measures.

The project goal was to center Indigenous knowledge to co-create a path to reduce epistemic and ontological inequalities that are often present in the research processes, especially working across borders. The objectives were to clarify how the state has been both—active and complacent in respecting Indigenous Women’s rights. Second, to examine the processes that led to the silencing of pieces of their identity and contributed to the marginalization of Indigenous Women’s voices, particularly in feminist organizing and NGOs. Third, to advance a resistance and transformative agenda in Indigenous knowledge co-creation. Finally, to contribute to the agenda of knowledge as resistance, rooted in a complementary relationship between Indigenous and Global North epistemologies. Maintaining a critical lens inward meant that both the Global North and South teams were responsible for community engagement that adhered to the decolonial principles to co-create knowledge to activate resistance and address injustice (Karki, 2016).

Learning about the oppression and resistance of Indigenous Women in their spaces allows for the deeper meanings embedded in their ways of knowing to become a part of the learnings (Karki, 2016). This project did not take for granted, or attempt to ignore, global relations of power and how research contributes to epistemic violence (Dutta and Basu, 2016). Steps were taken to minimize the power imbalance that often characterize collaborations between those in the Global North and South. This would reduce epistemic authority, that is often claimed and affirmed by those in the Global North (Author’s Own, 2020). These steps were: shared decision making, equal voice and direction, and leadership arising from the community (Israel et al., 2010). This theoretical footing was central to redistribute power in the processes, but also to scrutinize the cross-border collaboration, to keep focus on the role of coloniality in International Social Work (Carranza, 2018; Carranza et al., 2020; El-Lahib, 2015; Escobar, 2010; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018; Razack, 2009). At the time of the auto-ethnography, six consultations, designed to gather feedback and support for the project, had been conducted with both rural and urban communities. In total 73 Indigenous Women ages 18–70, Men, Elders and service providers had participated. The community expressed support for the project and affirmed the methods, specifically the use of oral traditions. The proposed methods were not static or linear and the consultations were open discussions to guide the project in grounding the decolonial attitude in praxis.

Coloniality’s globally diffuse nature, ensures the colonial gaze has been internalized across borders and cultures, so much so that thinking outside the rigid epistemological and ontological boundaries is a struggle. The project members who physically live in the Global South, also mentally set foot in the Global North whenever they draw upon coloniality’s epistemologies and ontologies to think and act (Karki, 2016; Mignolo, 2011). During year one of the project, some of the tensions that can occur in Global North/South collaborations began to emerge (Carranza et al., 2020). This was evident in two key examples. The first, during consultations the PI was repeatedly asked by collaborators from the Global South “what is it that you want to study”, despite frequent reassurances by the

Global North that this project was to be built from the ground up. Second, team members from the Global South consistently requested a ‘logic model’ to visually illustrate the project’s strategies and expected outcomes. A Logic Model requires standardized linear thinking that is focused on achieving deadlines and measuring productivity and outcomes (Wehbi, Parada, George and Lessa, 2016). This was initially refused to resist neoliberal tools of project management. After these two incidents, it became evident that critical reflection was needed to determine what processes were derailing the decolonial goals. One member of the team in the Global North decided to conduct an auto-ethnography to determine how power flowed within the project and think through the path forward. What was revealed was how the logic of coloniality maintained the colonial relationship, positioning the Global North as “knower”.

Methods

Auto-ethnography

One of the key convergences with ethnography and decolonial research is the uncovering of how discourses are maintained by privileging certain voices and silencing others. Through auto-ethnography we explored how coloniality as a social phenomenon is constituted, functions in and structures research, and situates these operations and the researchers within the larger relations of modernity. Those who embrace a decolonial attitude are willing to ask, reflect, theorize, and walk towards pathways that challenges the universality of modernity/coloniality. This shares an affinity with social constructionism, one of the theoretical underpinnings of ethnography (Witkin, 2014). There is no claim to objectivity or truth, rather questioning the multiplicity of realities and interpretations. Ethnography presents an opportunity to explore these claims, by analyzing how dominant discourses impact the social and cultural context and how they in turn, are reinforced (Witkin, 2014). This auto-ethnography engaged the research team from the Global North in a reflexive dialogue through auto-interviewing, reviewed field notes and the project journal to identify the reproductions of dominant discourse. The goal was to think through the current status of the project to try and move away from the “top down” or neoliberal pathway that had emerged. Continuing this pathway would mean the researchers ran the risk of “reproducing privileged knowledge”. The inquiry intended to locate how the team in the Global North was implicated and complicit in rearticulating coloniality/modernity.

Auto-ethnography adds an additional element to thinking through reflexivity and the connection to power (Chang, 2016). It enables researchers to engage in a variety of ways of knowing and being, by focusing on the space where memories, performances, meanings and histories intersect (Hughes and Pennington, 2016). Criticisms of this method are centered on how the researcher’s voice is centered as knower while also being the participant. Analytical reflexivity stresses the importance of recognizing the power dynamics between the researcher and their data.

Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2016) suggest one way to counterbalance this criticism is to gather data, or rather “stuff” (p. 59), to triangulate the auto-ethnographer’s findings and voice, to work through the layers of subjectivity (Chang, 2016). The “stuff” used here was an auto-interview with the team in the Global North, analysis of the field notes of the PI/RA, and the project journal that all team members contributed to (Anderson and Glass-Coffin, 2016; Chang, 2016). Triangulation was deepened through a collaborative writing process with all three members of the Global North team. This also ensured a rigorous analytical process.

Anderson’s (2006) five features of analytic auto-ethnography: i) complete member researcher (CMR) status, ii) analytic reflexivity, iii) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, iv) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and v) commitment to an analytic agenda were followed as guiding principles. CMR involves those researchers who are a member of the social world they are studying, either by being born into or becoming completely immersed into the group. Narrative visibility of the researcher enhances the visibility of the researcher’s positionality and demonstrates how the researcher is implicated and complicit in recreating the social world. Dialogue with informants calls for researchers to have transparent discussions with their research partners and their participants (Hughes and Pennington, 2016). To situate the personal within the political, the commitment to “visibility of researcher’s self, strong reflexivity, relational engagement, personal vulnerability, and open-ended rejection of finality and closure” (Anderson and Glass-Coffin, 2016, p. 59) was the basis for data gathering, thinking and analyzing and the writing. However, as later discussed by Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2016) these features are not a map or step-by-step instructions, rather signposts meant to guide the blending of personal and academic.

Triangulation

Auto-ethnographic triangulation enhances the credibility of the researchers self-reflexive/reflective interpretation (Hughes and Pennington, 2016), ability to verify the data, prove authenticity and/or increase generalizability. For this reason, the role of the Global North team members’ recollections was problematized by juxtaposing them with the collection of project documents (Hughes and Pennington, 2016). Triangulation involves identifying three sources of “stuff” to use as data, collected to use in the analysis (Anderson and Glass-Coffin, 2016). The “stuff” was project meeting minutes, field notes, auto-interviews to garner personal reflections on the research process with Global North team members, and a collaborative research journal (Hughes and Pennington, 2016). The research journal facilitated critical reflection and reflexivity throughout the entirety of the research process, including the positionality of all members. The two auto-interviews were designed to analyze each team member’s role in shaping the relationships between partners, the participants, and how this informed the lens used for data analysis (Kimpson, 2005).

Rigor through reflexivity

Engaging in critical reflexivity and reflection during the autoethnographic process is integral to demonstrating rigor and legitimizing personal experiences as products of the political arena (Hughes and Pennington, 2016). To do so, it is important to explain how this paper understands critical self-reflexivity and reflection and how it was approached. These two practices are integral to locating and understanding how scholars' positionalities guide their research (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Critical reflexivity is the process of analyzing and attempting to comprehend how our subject positions interact with the world around us (Jeffery, 2007). Critical reflection is the practice of analyzing how inner belief systems shape interactions and relationships with others (Jeffery, 2007; Miehls and Moffatt, 2000). Meanwhile, self-reflexivity goes beyond self-reflection and asks us to interrogate, problematize and unravel how positionalities and inner belief systems are a product of historical and contemporary social systems and processes (Herising, 2005; Miehls and Moffatt, 2000; Moosa-Mitha, 2005). In this case, critical self-reflexivity problematizes how the team is a part of a multi-layered world that imbues power onto subject positions and how this contributes to this world's reformulation of coloniality in research (Herising, 2005; Moosa-Mitha, 2005).

Auto-interviewing was used to unpack positionality in relation to the story of the research, and to open space to narrate each team member's process of reflexivity (Anderson and Glass-Coffin, 2016). Boufoy-Bastick (2004) explained, auto-interviews are useful for filling in gaps within auto-ethnographers' self-awareness. This technique is useful because it can help to give further meaning and shed light into how the socio-political-cultural conditions are interpreted. Using reflexive didactic interview methods (Anderson and Glass-Coffin, 2016) the group met twice, with the first author preparing an interview protocol and facilitating discussion amongst the team. The questions were designed to work toward a co-constructed narrative of the research processes, timelines, and decision points (Anderson and Glass-Coffin, 2016). Team members reflected on their memories, and collectively, the group traced the indicators of coloniality in each of their stories. This process required each team member to articulate how their position on the colonial grid shaped their experiences and how they made sense of the research. There was a focus on how the relationships developed and the trajectory between the Global North and the Global South. Key intersection points where coloniality clearly emerged were noted and analyzed as the narrative was created.

Positionality

This auto-ethnography brought visibility to the shifting unequal power relations between researchers from the Global North and the Global South (Jeffery, 2007; Moosa-Mitha, 2005). More specifically, how coloniality/modernity has bestowed greater legitimacy onto academics who speak from Western institutions in comparison to those who speak from 'subaltern' positions in the Global South.

This legitimacy was evident in the stories of how their ideas, theories, and opinions were treated with more value than what was happening in the Global South. The PI (second author) is both Indigenous and Spanish - a Mestiza, middle class, cisgendered woman from the Central American Diaspora in Canada. She speaks fluent Spanish and, in the diaspora, and across Latin America she has experienced some elements of 'sameness'. She is also an Associate Professor at an academic institution in the Global North but, has been othered through her journey to Canada. The co-investigator (first author) is a second-generation heterosexual cisgender Mestizo male with Central American ancestry, middle class, who speaks Spanish and is outwardly racially ambiguous. He is also currently completing his doctoral degree in the Global North and has extensive professional experience as a social worker. The project coordinator identifies as a white cisgendered woman who has achieved graduate education and has years of experience in social work.

The data collection relied on local RAs, to build connections and work towards sustainability, who are themselves elites due to their ability to speak either English, Spanish, and their native tongue (Fox, 2008; Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Potts and Brown, 2005). The RAs were local to each area, Indigenous women and university students. Those in the Global North and partner organizations in the Global South were to provide mentorship on methods and participant engagement. These positionalities increased the likelihood that Global North and to some extent the South, would replicate the logic of coloniality when working with the RAs—reproducing privileged knowledge. Many precautions were taken to prevent this but were unsuccessful.

Findings of the auto-ethnography

To the point of this auto-ethnography, there had been community consultations and a critical discourse analysis (CDA). The CDA, which is a Western method of knowledge production, presented a significant amount of challenges as discussed below. Tensions emerged when the social justice and resistance goals came up against the modernity/colonial rubric. What was learned through this process was, working within the trappings of neoliberalism created an unavoidable cycle of reproducing coloniality. In tracing coloniality, the trajectory created for the project by the politics and logics of coloniality became evident. The modernity/coloniality rubric that has saturated the globe, is deeply embedded in how collaborations operate. Auto-ethnography provided the space to discuss how coloniality was experienced, reinforced and maintained by those in the Global North. Perhaps most importantly, how identities and positionalities are implicated based on geography and position on the colonial grid. The findings are broken up into three sections. First, a review how coloniality manifested itself in the project's initial planning stages, emerging through the colonial condition. Second, situating the project's struggle(s) to meet deadlines and timelines within the larger colonial

relationship. Third, a reflexive discussion on how power operated during the project's research process.

The colonial condition

Upon reflection, it was determined that the partners in the Global South appeared to expect and want, project members from the Global North to dictate the research process, despite the previous agreement. For example, one of the previously mentioned incidents, the request for a logic model indicated the desire for a more rigid managerial approach. During the auto-interviews the Global North team recounted the conflictual choice between a tool of neoliberalism, and the desire of the team in the Global South for the work to be guided in this format. When reading deeper into these reflections, the team from the Global North was attempting to avoid performing colonial managerialism—by advocating for flexibility and not rooting the work in meeting benchmarks and expected outcomes. The project was drawn into reinforcing the politics and logics of coloniality by creating neoliberal tools to keep the project moving, with a focus on outputs as opposed to processes. This, too, is reflective of modernity. These observations shed light on how coloniality has carved a pathway for transactional relationships where the exchange is, outcomes for funding.

One team member from the Global North spoke about how the Global South was questioning their capabilities because they were not following “known and legitimate” Western ways of knowledge production. As the holders of the funds, there was an expectation to dictate how the money would be spent. This member stated, despite emphasizing process and the need to build the project from the group up, she was told by members from the Global South that the absence of a logic model and concrete outcomes “made their job harder, they did not know what to do or what was expected”. Thinking this statement through, the team noted in the auto-interview that this was a key intersection point. The PI spoke to the existence of colonial conditioning “lots of academics come from the Global North say they want specific outcomes, so people have learned to work within these guidelines while using the money/opportunity to advance their own work”. This phenomena is understood as the team in the Global South responding to the unearned power and privileges attributed to academics from the Global North and their ability to dictate whose understanding of reality, time, and knowledge production has ‘value’ and ‘worth’. It also speaks to the ways that those in the Global South have had to historically navigate research partnerships to receive funding from the Global North and the indelible scars this negotiation has had on their psyche. The Global North wanted to focus on process, and the Global South wanted direction on meeting the outcomes.

Additionally, when considering that the partner agencies rely on funding from the Global North, the role of coloniality comes into sharper focus. SSHRC funding has regulations the host University has to reimburse each expense. The partners supported the idea to create an outcomes-based pay structure. Each outcome

would be assigned a dollar value and they could have their own internal breakdown of the financial allotment. This method was initially to sidestep funding restrictions and give them greater control over their work. However, the auto-interviews revealed that the processes and work became reduced to a monetary exchange—as a transfer of funds could have minimized some of the power imbalances. Outcomes based financials align with logic models to create set expectations, standards, and benchmarks that ultimately work against a focus on process. This process is marked by modernity, outcomes as progress. Logic models embed specific expectations to achieve goals along a set timeline, which those in the Global South have learned to navigate. One project team member spoke about a reflexive conversation they had with an Indigenous leader who theorized that this phenomenon was a product of the region's colonial legacy and people's internalization of the colonial gaze. Put differently, this phenomenon was a representation of the people internalizing the politics and logic of coloniality and attempting to meet their own needs within its rigid boundaries. Ultimately, the colonial grid positions those who live in the Global South, even those who hold mestizo and white positionalities, as less worthy in comparison to those from the Global North.

Deadlines and deliverables: Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

In the summer of 2018, the project hired Research Assistants (RAs), supervised by one of the NGO partners in [Country] and a team member from the Global North. The RAs and the first author met weekly by video-chat and the discussions focused on the nuances of CDA, or any struggles and questions. The team of RAs from the NGO were consistently behind in completing their assigned tasks and the situation had become complex. As the project progressed, it became apparent that meeting the deadlines and the timelines set out by the logic model and the funder would be a challenge. A project report was due at the end of March 2019. The team from the Global North met to reflexively/reflectively discuss why the project was behind, the notes from those meetings were analyzed as a part of the data. During this discussion, there were multiple perspectives about the RA's workload. Informed by observations on the ground by the team in the Global North, it was determined that the RAs were completing separate work assigned by the NGO and were not prioritizing the project. The Global North team understood this to be a result of a greater sense of accountability to the NGO due to proximity and face-to-face. Second, that the RAs had the possibility of future stable work with the organization in [Country] once the research project was completed.

Afterwards, the team from Global North addressed these concerns with the partners. In response, concerns were expressed about workload and the frequency of video-chats requested by the Global North team. They requested a reduced workload to which the team from the Global North agreed, however after a period of a few months the project had not progressed. Once again, the team from the Global North met to discuss next steps. First, the team from the Global North agreed it was necessary to address their concerns once more and

stressed the consequences of not meeting the fast-approaching deadlines. The team from the Global North agreed that if this conversation was not successful, they would explore letting go of the current RAs and/or ending their research partnership and seek out a new one with another NGO. The entire project team met and discussed the abovementioned concerns, specifically the failure to meet these deadlines could lead to SSHRC reducing or eliminating funding. It was agreed that if the current team were unable to complete their assigned tasks then they would be replaced. After this conversation, the RAs began to make progress in their assigned tasks.

When asked to reflect on these events during one of the auto-interviews, a Global North team member spoke about the “power of the funder”. The accountability rested with the Global North “in which we have to do a report and next year’s funding was subject to this report” and combined with the logic model, were responsible to not only the funder to meet the goals, but the project and community. The presence of coloniality’s politics and logics in neoliberal management models re-emerged in this discussion. The story constructed in the auto-interview narrated how CoP and the power arising from the funder within the Canadian colonial settler state, validated who should make decisions and direct the research process. In another auto-interview, one Global North team member recounted how NGOs in Latin America are often sub-contracted by the government and international organizations, but opportunities have become limited. As a result, NGOs have begun “using money in strategic ways that match the logic model . . . so they are used to using the funding money in their own ways and not accustomed to the collaborative involved process”. Consequently, this led to the collaborators to strategically utilize funding and the project’s RAs to advance their own projects because they, like many NGOs, were financially stretched to the limit and were required to do more work, with less funding. When asked about their use of funding, one Global North team member indicated the agreement was “the RAs would work 70% on our project and 30% the partner’s other projects, but what happened was the other way around, they worked 30% on our project, and 70% or more on their projects”. Another Global North team member commented “I think it’s ethically correct from my perspective that they use that money. . . . the project has received a lot of knowledge from them . . .so they too need to benefit and hire a staff member that can assist them to meet other deadlines”. It became evident that how monetary resources were utilized fueled the tensions within the project. Money became a symbolic representation of the coloniality of power; and both the Global North and the Global South were using this power to achieve their goals.

Locating power

Since its inception, this project attempted to embrace a decolonial attitude and build the project from the ground up. The project began with community consultations, decision-making power would be centered in [Country], and encouraged

horizontal decision making. For example, the project had initially not budgeted for a team of researchers in [Country], however when the collaborators requested further assistance, the budget was changed to meet this need. Moreover, the project's outcomes were determined for the budget line, by the NGOs. However, this reflexive process revealed that whoever controls the funding is exercising, intentionally or unintentionally, the logic of coloniality and imbued with power. Consequently, tensions arose amongst about how and where the money was spent. In an auto-interview when asked to reflect about how power operated within the project, a Global North team member commented that the project was experiencing the "challenges of horizontal decision making" and a focus on outcomes rather than processes. Alternatively, embracing the decolonial attitude was hindered by CoP that flows through the requirements of funders, embedded in the logic model. It became evident that a neoliberal organization that demands deliverables does not support the desire to resist CoP on the ground. Although the project team from the Global North attempted to engage in decolonial praxis, the entanglements created by the CoP enacted through funding requirements and the desire for modernity, required some strategic decision making.

Discussion

Uncovering the ways that coloniality shaped the researchers' positionality and the research process, moves social justice work forward. It also situated the members of both the teams in the Global North and the Global South as possessing multiple identities that represent the colonial project. Under the CoP, identities are organized along a colonial grid that demarcates who belongs and who has access to power and privilege. Using this configuration moves beyond binary terms - colonizer/colonized (Carranza, 2018). That said, coloniality is not a politic and logic that exists 'here' or 'out there', but one that underpins what is considered valid research, who is knower, and what should be researched. Therefore, it requires auto-ethnography to pinpoint and illuminate how coloniality operates (Anderson, 2006). Ethnography studies the social world, how it is constructed and maintained. For social workers, this is often communities that experience marginalization and the professionals that have power over. This work expanded the social work approach to reflexivity, which deconstructs one's own subjectivities in relation to the colonial matrix to map out how these interlocators play out in research. It speaks to how the "I" and the power embedded within the subject position impacted the research. Auto-ethnography focused on these positionalities from the perspective of how CoP operates and structures cross-border collaborations and how researchers exist within and reinforce these discourses. Auto-ethnography examines this from the inside out, through the lens of insider group membership. This made visible both—the researchers of the Global North within the social setting of this study and provided insider knowledge. In this paper, the researcher's self becomes textually visible, while grappling with their group membership. As members of the research group in the Global North were entangled with the power of

the funder and lived in a colonizing space. The positionalities, Western education, class, and race provide those in the Global North with considerable unearned privileges. The auto-ethnography served to critically engage with the particulars of coloniality and the mapping of neoliberalism, from the perspective of group members. This perspective shows how coloniality shapes experience and, how individuals in turn remake coloniality in relation to others.

Decolonial work encourages a co-creation of knowledge as a site of resistance. However, knowledge is dependent on the mode, or ways of knowing and interpreting (Hastrup, 2004), which means in this project it was not free of coloniality's influence. Engaging in anthropological methods holds a unique opportunity for social work, a way to map the social world of research while tracing one's own active and implicit engagement with coloniality as a phenomenon. Auto-ethnography uses the researchers decolonial knowledge to engage their own perspectives to connect with the extant literature, a potential departure from social work's reflexivity. At times, social work and social work research can fall short of action. By remaining in the imaginary, the intents of social justice do not transfer into practices outcomes that alter people's lived realities. This inaction, and remaining in the theoretical, are key criticisms of reflexivity (Buscatto, 2016). Borrowing methods to turn the eye inward, to map the culture of or structures of one research project show promise and direction for action—particularly on the uneven power dynamics between the Global North and South.

Epistemological and ontological changes are deeply embedded in place. As such, methodologies and interpretations of methodologies are altered by these locations. As evidenced in this auto-ethnography, the decolonial attitude was actualized differently 'from below'. Decolonizing research and knowledge cannot be accomplished with the methods that continue to uphold unequal power relations. The team in the Global North existed within and upheld the politics and culture of neoliberalism and could not separate their work from it. Those in the Global South had learned to navigate these processes for their own purposes and localities; and in some ways were historically and contemporarily conditioned by it. Understanding what happens when the two come together to undo this, can only be successful when a mapping of the context occurs, revealing the multiplicity of knowledges and perceptions of reality that will contribute to the research. What was accomplished in this data gathering was an exploration of how knowledge intimately interacts with both place and space and how this is embedded in practice. The dimensions of place and space were evidenced in the way that decolonial praxis was taken up and activated, and their perceptions of, the teams in the Global South and North. The ways of decolonizing were drafted in, and coopted by, the Global North and thus remained rooted in their ideologies and methods. This approach ignored the reality that coloniality had previously carved out roles and ways of engaging between the North and South that have been, to some degree internalized. While those in the North must remain mindful of how "we" are implicated within the globe's colonial legacy, there are tangible ways that entanglement shapes our interactions. Therefore, 'we' from the Global North must not

discount neoliberal tools as counterproductive to decolonial work or ignore their history and meaning in the Global South. The coloniality of power has constructed the world as it is currently experienced and, in some spaces, created methods giving the illusion of challenging its existence.

The project also hired RAs who were Indigenous women whom led data collection and analysis—using ancestral knowledge and practices. The hope was that these strategies would encourage a decolonial attitude—what was evidenced in this auto-ethnography was that decolonial attitudes are place specific. Each group member, based on locality, struggled against the ‘colonial condition’ and engaged in their own unique decolonial praxis to varying degrees. Decolonial scholars such as Mignolo and Walsh (2018), Maldonado-Torres (2008) and Escobar (2010) have called for academics to engage in decolonial praxis and embrace marginalized understandings of epistemology and ontology. Through this process these decolonial scholars argue that academics can begin challenging the universality of modernity/coloniality and begin illuminating how our contemporary social structures maintain and facilitate people’s marginalization and oppression.

Through this reflexive process, the research team from the Global North was able to identify some of the ways that we are implicated and complicit in rearticulating the politics and logics of coloniality, despite decolonial praxis. For example, the funding originated from the Canadian colonial settler state. State regulations are a manifestation of the coloniality of power that advocates for neoliberal capitalism. Those in the Global South had worked with some version of this before and could strategize in a way that worked for them, while reinforcing coloniality— a compromise of sorts. This is twofold, the project was beholden to logic of coloniality that demands that we produce knowledge on a set timeline or else become stigmatized within the academic community. While attempting to resist this and navigate in a different way, timelines were requested and needed to be enforced based on how logic models operate. Consequently, these timelines inhibited our ability to engage in decolonial praxis. The paradox is, to challenge colonial structures the project ended up relying on funding that was generated from colonial settler state. This auto-ethnography demonstrated the project’s paradoxical position. As researchers wanting to illuminate how coloniality operated to marginalize Indigenous women living in [Country], it rearticulated a colonial power dynamic in our research partnerships.

Decolonial praxis is messy and there continues to be a separation between thinking and praxis. When we attempted to embrace a plurality of marginalized perspectives, it was evident that avoiding tensions within the research process regarding who had final decision-making power was already predetermined. This auto-ethnography demonstrated that attempts to embrace the decolonial attitude were hindered by our reliance on funding from the colonial settler state. Any project that relies on the colonial state for funding will become entangled within the coloniality of power and cannot fully engage in decolonial praxis. Coulthard (2014) has stated that decolonization will never originate from the settler state but will come from direct action that originates from the margins. For this reason,

future scholars who wish to embrace a decolonial attitude must explore alternative funding methods to avoid becoming entangled with the coloniality of power.

Decoloniality is a worldview, a standpoint, and a way of thinking, feeling, engaging, moving, making, doing, analyzing that is actional and practical and ever continuing (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). Furthermore, decoloniality is relational in that it simultaneously sees, thinks, and acts in the past-present-future and can be understood as an everyday practice, process, and project of planting, nurturing, and spreading the idea of a possible otherwise existing within the margins, cracks, borders, and spaces between the structures that support the modern/colonial/capitalist/racial/cis-heteropatriarchal global order (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). Thus, there is a plurality of methods to engage in decolonial praxis and as researchers in the Global North, we see auto-ethnography as a promising method to continually examine and locate one's way of feeling, thinking, sensing, being, and acting to hold oneself, the project, and the research accountable. Auto-ethnography provides the discernments of anthropology to assist in finding new insights that cannot be accomplished by social work alone. Anthropological methods illuminate the well-worn pathways that social work has followed and ways that coloniality is remade. This cross pollination of ideas can potentially sow new seeds of decolonial thought and praxis for both disciplines.

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Note

1. Country name anonymous as to protect the identity of participants' and community partners.

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