Title: The Challenge of Western-Influenced Notions of Knowledge and Research Training: Lessons for Decolonizing the Research Process and Researcher Education

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Abstract

In this paper, based on fieldwork experiences in Ethiopia, we have taken an African and Indigenous perspective to highlight and critically reflect on how Western notions of knowledge and research training for social work sometimes fail to engage meaningfully with local realities and disregard cultural and religious practices. This paper argues, from an Ethiopian and African perspective, for culturally appropriate research training. It proposes this can be achieved by making researcher training curricula more inclusive, by reassessing funding flows, and for research supervisors to foster critical reflexivity in their students, reminding them that cultural histories and geographies of research participants are central to the research process.

Keywords: Coloniality, decolonization, Ethiopia, methodology, reflexivity.

Introduction

Traditionally, the term colonization has been associated with territorial control and has been used to describe the structural effects of political domination of one nation over another subjugated country (or countries) (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Coloniality, on the other hand, to be differentiated from colonialism, refers to the established power structures that emerged as a result of colonialism and define culture, relations, and knowledge production far beyond the strict boundaries of colonial administrations (Quijano, 2007). Consequently, coloniality survives colonialism and is kept alive in books, in cultural patterns, in cultural and social norms, in people's understanding of themselves or others, in aspirations for the self, in standards of academic achievement, and in various other aspects of our modern experience (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

The process of "decolonization" has evolved from the desire to remove this colonial domination and coloniality and to liberate local/Indigenous knowledge, practice, and culture from the incumbent power (Emnet, 2021). A "decolonial turn" or "decolonial attitude" is required that questions the impact of colonization on modern subjectivities, the production of knowledge, and critical thinking (Maldonado-Torres 2007). A decolonial stance involves responsibility and willingness to take many perspectives, especially the perspectives and viewpoints of those whose existence is questioned and portrayed as insignificant (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). "It is about making the invisible visible and analyzing the mechanisms that create this invisibility" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p.262). Decolonization fundamentally challenges the global hierarchy and the Westernized notion of knowledge production and epistemic hegemony, which claims that the values of the Global North are the closest to objective truth and, thus, should form the standard for rationality, reality, and civilization in the Global South (Emnet, 2021). Decolonization is not only about the Global South having their local perspectives usurped by Global North perspectives when these may not be

appropriate to the local context. It is the predominance of any external nonlocal perspective on the local.

Taking such a singular perspective dominated by Western-centric frameworks negatively impacts the development of inclusive epistemologies and frameworks in many disciplines, including social work (Gray & Fook, 2004). In fact, many consider social work in postcolonial contexts to be a Western invention, and social workers around the world are increasingly raising their voices against the forces of "professional imperialism", particularly in the Global South (Gray & Fook, 2004). Over the past three decades, social work researchers have sought to raise awareness of the dominance of Western influences on local social work practices and the assumptions and cultural biases associated with such dominance. This Western dominance overshadows the potential contribution of other theories and models of practice for Indigenous and other non-Western communities (O'Leary et al., 2013).

"We do not live in space; we live in places. To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in" (Casey, 1996, p. 18). This statement by Casey relates not only to the lives of ordinary people, but also to the activities of social work researchers and to the importance of local context for their understanding and research. It fits into the growing global decolonization movement and specifically calls for the decolonization of research and research agendas, and it is about developing a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations, and values that underpin research practice (Smith 2012). Conducting research without considering coloniality poses risks for Indigenous/local communities such as producing studies that are culturally insensitive, lack relevance, produce a Western-based analysis and interpretation that does not reflect the local reality or context, and do not benefit or contribute to positive change for the local community (Wilson et al., 2019). Often such research also results in laying the blames for these problems at the door of the individuals themselves rather than challenging the structural and cultural aspects that

perpetuate oppression for Indigenous peoples. Coloniality can disempower Indigenous/local communities and can reinforce stigmatization and discrimination (ibid.). As African scholar Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) asserts, there is a need to establish "epistemic freedom" and "cognitive justice" as essential prerequisites for beginning genuine and problem-solving studies in Africa and the wider Global South.

Researchers conducting studies in the Global South and in Indigenous communities have been accused of historical exploitation of Indigenous or local knowledge without proper acknowledgement and compensation (Kuruk, 2020; Wilson et al., 2019; Abbott et al., 2018). They are accused of unauthorized disclosure of sensitive information about Indigenous/local communities, of insensitivity to Indigenous/local cultural norms, and of conducting research studies that fail to benefit local communities (Kuruk, 2020; Wilson et al., 2019; Abbott et al., 2018). A history of exploitative research practices leads to mistrust and forces Indigenous communities to start from a position of caution and skepticism when it comes to participating in research (Abbott et al., 2018).

Despite these challenges to researchers conducting studies in culturally diverse settings, the discussion of coloniality and decolonization processes, particularly in the Global South, is limited. There is in particular a lack of attention when it comes to documenting practical real-world experiences of the researchers involved. Further, there have been increasing efforts in recent years from various theoretical perspectives, particularly in Australia and New Zealand, to critically interrogate and reflect on the impact of colonialism in past and present institutions and practices and in the production of knowledge in the Global North (Aliverti et al., 2021; Rynne & Cassematis, 2015). However, in the Global South, particularly in Africa and Ethiopia, discussions of research methodologies informed by Indigenous knowledge systems are rarely used in studies. Much of the discussion that takes place is found in the fields of health, education, politics, and literature (Emnet, 2021).

To address this gap, this paper explores and critically reflects on one social worker´s (first author) experience of conducting a qualitative social work-related project in the criminal justice environment in Ethiopia. We, as a research team, reflect on the first author's experiences as a researcher who conducted her PhD research in her home country of Ethiopia, whilst registered in a European PhD program and supervised by European supervisors. It explores how a Western-influenced notion of social work knowledge and research education that formed part of this researcher´s training sometimes failed to relate meaningfully to the local context of Ethiopian and African realities and cultural and religious practices. By doing this, the article offers social work researchers' insights into the impact coloniality may have on their research projects and their interactions with research participants in culturally diverse contexts. This perspective will help them develop new theoretical insights and to engage with and reflect on cultural and historical differences (Cunneen, 2011). It is important to emphasize that this article is not a rejection of all Western methods and theories. Rather, it is a call to explore, evaluate, and use Indigenous knowledge and approaches on an equal footing with Western knowledge and methods when appropriate.

A Social Work Research Project in Ethiopia as the Illustrative Case

We ground our discussion and decolonization analysis in our experience of a social work-related project conducted on the lived experience of motherhood after incarceration in Ethiopia. The study adopted a descriptive phenomenological approach by using in-depth interviews to elucidate the essence of the phenomenon of motherhood after prison from the detailed description of each mother. The first author (EB) interviewed nine mothers who had experienced incarceration in different cities in Ethiopia between September and November 2020. The study was conducted in a country whose traditions and religious practices date back thousands of years (Henze, 2000) and that is known for its diverse traditions and ethnicities (more than 80 ethnic groups and languages) and religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and

other traditional religious and shamanic rituals) (Henze, 2000). Although (EB) had no personal experience of incarceration and is not a mother, she grew up in a culturally diverse community in Ethiopia and was born and grow up in Addis Ababa. She also speaks the local language (Amharic) and is part of the dominant ethnic groups, which are the Oromo and Amhara. These aspects make her both an insider and an outsider in the cultural and religious group being studied.

Drawing on the first author's (EB) experiences in the field and her position as a young ethnic Ethiopian woman, we reflect on the challenges faced in conducting doctoral research within a culturally diverse environment using the framework of the *coloniality of knowledg*e. The coloniality of knowledge is one of the key dimensions of coloniality, which is evident in the dominance of Western perspectives, theories, methods, and language in education and research in the Global South, especially in the African context (Quijano, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). It also raises epistemological questions, such as who creates what knowledge and for what purpose, and how specific knowledge disempowers or empowers certain peoples and communities (Quijano, 2007). The framework of the coloniality of knowledge prompted (EB) to reflect on her existing knowledge of what it means to be a social work researcher and the implications and challenges this has for knowledge production in the Global South, particularly in Ethiopia, in the next section. In what follows, we use the pronoun "I" to refer to (EB), as she is the principal researcher.

Lack of Connection from the Local Context

Ambiguous Professional Boundaries

Although research training has made much progress in recent decades, many researchers still do not receive enough culturally appropriate training for conducting research with Indigenous or non-Western communities (Datta, 2018; Smith, 2012). Although researchers are not

necessarily expected to remain unemotional in qualitative research, I was unsure how to maintain professional boundaries while sharing the participants' emotions in a culturally diverse context in Ethiopia. See the excerpt from my reflective diary below:

> *The story one participant told me was emotionally heavy, and it was emotionally hard to respond to, and I was unsure how to react. Especially the story she told me about her husband (how she witnessed his suicidal moment along with her son) was very hard to take and made me very emotional during the interview. As she cried, I, too, struggled with my tears. I was also confused at that moment about whether I should cry with her and hug her or not. But I thought I should be professional and held back my emotions and tears and continued the interview after I gave her some time to cry and calm down.* (Research Journal; Gobena, 2020)

As qualitative researchers and working with participants, we sometimes forget the importance of creating relationships on a human level because we are influenced by the Western philosophical tradition that sometimes views emotions as obstacles to academic research and professional boundary (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). As a researcher and social worker, I went through a long socialization process in Ethiopia (undergraduate studies) and mainly in Norway (Masters and PhD studies), where being professional and setting ethical boundaries are of utmost importance. These ethical approaches have been developed to address the power imbalance and risk of exploitation that can arise in relationships with research participants within the domain of professional research practice (Banks, 2006). Yet, they are based on a more general conceptualization, have more prescriptive guidelines, and do not adequately take culture into account (O'Leary et al., 2013).

The Ethical Principles of Social Work (IASSW, 2018), for instance, emphasizes the importance of culture and context in professional work and in setting boundaries. However, there are grey areas in research that need to be addressed. What do culturally sensitive

boundaries look like practically? How can we as researchers find out about these boundaries? How can we discuss and understand boundary setting in a culturally affirming and responsive way? How much room for maneuver do researchers have within culturally sensitive boundaries? This shows that while ethical principles may be uncontentious on the surface, on closer inspection, they are highly dependent on culture, space, and time (Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019). This is particularly important in the Global South, such as Africa and Ethiopia, where professional socialization can create barriers to social work research (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2001).

Conducting research with vulnerable groups such as women with experience of incarceration in a culturally diverse country like Ethiopia means working with people of different cultures, religions, and life experiences. Although the Norwegian guidelines (NESH, 2019), which guided my research, urge researchers to pay specific attention to vulnerable groups and to have knowledge about local traditions, cultural and social matters, and so forth when conducting research on various cultures, they nevertheless present unique challenges for researchers for which they may not be adequately prepared. While such research guidelines serve as tools for researchers and are used to identify relevant factors that researchers should take into account, they also acknowledge that researchers often have to weigh such factors against each other, as well as against other conflicting requirements and obligations. My experience of research courses was that they focused on teaching a scientific approach, i.e., instead of helping me acquire practical and context-specific skills and knowledge such as how to interact with participants, how to build relationships with local communities, why we need to care about the cultural nuances and norms of our participants, and how to identify their needs in a way that benefits the local community or group. Sewpaul & Henrickson (2019) argue that:

> *Social work has become far more than a liberal humanist profession whose center was located on a European-North American axis. Given the range of taken-for-granted assumptions and the rhetoric that underscores social work ethics, the rootedness of social work ethics in hegemonic liberal humanist discourses makes them a poor fit with Indigenous, Asian, Arab, and African realities.* (p.1470)

To some extent, this argument is also consistent with the postmodern emphasis on the importance of "situatedness" or "contextuality", which holds that knowledge and identity are situated in that they each emerge and change in relation to the local context and perspectives of different actors (Gray & Fook, 2004).

Ambiguous Researcher Responsibility

The other challenge is related to our responsibility as researchers, which is at times ambiguous and unclear. Hean et al. (2021) extend Miller's (2001) concept of distributed responsibility and the researcher's responsibility to promote change rather than just being an observer of change. However, Datta (2018) and Wilson (2008) have noted that it can be a major challenge when researchers are not well informed about their responsibilities, and Hean et al. (2021) explore how a lack of preparation can have fatal consequences for researchers who actively, but perhaps naively, engage in volatile fields. This reminds me of two incidents that occurred in Ethiopia a few years ago. In the first case, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California was killed in an attack by anti-government protesters in the Oromia region while conducting her research (Whitcomb, 2016). The second case occurred in the Amhara region, where three researchers from the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa traveled to a village called Gonji to study intestinal worms and the eye disease trachoma in a local school. Two of them were killed by a mob who believed they were there to poison the children (Irungu & Berhanu, 2019). These unfortunate incidents are an indication that inadequate preparation with the

necessary knowledge and understanding of local social, cultural, and political realities before starting fieldwork can have serious consequences.

Although I was born and raised in Ethiopia, I was not aware that I had lost a number of values from my own culture, perhaps due to the years of living abroad and being socialized with Western values and education. During the Ph.D. study, most of the interviews were conducted in the church at the request of the participants because it was a quiet and safe place for both of us and most of them were followers of the Orthodox Christian Church. At first, I did not notice and was not aware of it, but I observed that some people in the church looked at me with a strange look because I did not adhere to the expected and appropriate dress during the interviews (covering myself). During one of the interviews, the church security guard even refused to let me enter the premises because I looked different. I was more focused on my "professional" academic protocol, such as consent and confidentiality towards the participants than on my responsibility to be sensitive to their cultural and religious protocols. The lack of sensitivity to cultural and religious protocol posed a risk to the interview process. Although the Norwegian ethical guidelines (NESH, 2019) place great demands on the initiation, planning, and execution of research projects when conducting studies in other countries or in minority cultures, Lavallée (2009) argues that researchers trained in Western science and ethics tend to favor the academic research protocol and pay less attention to the culture, and religion, and values of the participants.

The responsibility of supervisors is also another aspect of this issue. Could they have done more or done better in training our awareness and skills? Hean et al. (2021) argue that we are advocating for researchers and students to take a more active role, but they wonder if we are adequately preparing them to take on this responsibility. Tayler et al. (2017) also argue that although many institutions insist that doctoral students undergo appropriate training at the start of their studies, supervisors have a role in ensuring that students comply with and manage

the rules of academic integrity. Supervisors have a responsibility to prepare prospective researchers and students for the messy real work of research, for the barren land of blood, sweat, toil, and tears that can be encountered, and for situations where many things can go wrong (Taylor et al., 2017).

In my experience, our research training focuses on how to behave responsibly as a professional researcher, but not on what our responsibilities are to research participants in a socio-economically and culturally diverse context, even though our responsibility as researchers is also to make meaningful impacts on people's lives. For example, some of the study participants questioned the benefits of the research project in their lives. They explained that researchers use their stories and experiences to gain academic degrees, publish articles, and secure funding without any significant benefit to the women participating in the project. They were so desperate for any form of help I could give them. At such moments, I found myself in a difficult position, wondering: what impact will my research have on the lives of my participants? Is it practical and connected closely enough to the local context to bring about meaningful change? Or am I doing the research just to get my degree? Answering these practical questions was difficult. I felt that in some cases, my answers did not correspond to the reality of the local context in the Global South, i.e., the socio-economic and political situation of the countries.

Vulnerable groups such as women with incarceration experience regularly find themselves in a powerless, dependent position in their relationships with researchers, service providers, and authority figures (Agozino, 2002). These different power relations in this socio-political context, including between researchers and participants like formerly incarcerated mothers, pose a central problem of accountability in research studies with such groups. Colonialism is far from over (Smith, 2012), and invisible power dynamics embedded in the research agendas, aims, and frameworks are particularly evident in studies with vulnerable groups. If these are

not adequately explored, our research will not yield the desired outcomes. These challenges in my academic and professional research work have led me to rethink my role as a researcher and my responsibilities towards my research and research participants.

Future Direction and Recommendations

Reorientate Social Work Education and Training

In recent years, there have been significant changes in the restructuring and reorientation of the profession of social work. For example, the 2014 Global Definition of Social Work emphasizes the importance of indigenous knowledge and points to the need to rethink the way we teach social work students and conduct research (Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019). The full definition reads as follows:

> *Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities, and Indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.*
>
> *The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.* (IASSW & IFSW, 2014)

To our knowledge, however, there still might be a gap in the preparation of researchers and students in the way that this global definition envisions. The higher education system still lacks meaningful connections to the context, culture, and traditions of diverse communities around the world, both in Ethiopia and the Global South (Emnet, 2021, De Sousa Santos, 2018). For example, while social work as a profession is recognized in countries in the Global South such as Ethiopia, its curriculum and its ethical and professional standards and principles

are strongly based on the Western approach (Kebede, 2019). This is because there is no established body in Ethiopia responsible for codifying the fundamental values, ethical principles, and standards in line with the socio-cultural and political context of the country (ibid). Such disconnection of a system from the experiences and context of societies limits the ability of researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to develop and deliver solutions that can address the problems of target communities and groups. It also leads to knowledge production that is less relevant to local problems. Connell (2019) argues that the situation in higher education is related to contemporary forces of globalization and neoliberalism that have served to rewrite Northern or Western hierarchies of knowledge. These hierarchies are evident in the unequal distribution of research funding, resources, and personnel, in the creation of global university rankings, and in the dominance of English in global academic publishing (Connell, 2019; De Sousa Santos, 2018).

It is evident that current research education curricula are also tied to the labor market in order to ensure economic growth and a knowledge-based economy. This leads to greater formalization and a generic curriculum (Andres et al., 2015) that inadequately prepares students and researchers to deal with different contexts. This shows that the curriculum does not consider the increasing diversification of our universities (Connell, 2019). Many university classes, especially in urban areas, are made up of students who come from countries in all parts of the world. Researcher mobility has also increased worldwide, with approximately 3.6 million students enrolled as international students in tertiary education (Auriol, et al., 2013). This professional migration and interest in different countries has brought to light the previously taken-for-granted expectation that researchers should have the ability to work in countries other than the one in which they received their professional training (Hugman et al., 2010).

Although they are usually one-way or non-reciprocal (Greenfield et al., 2012; Razack, 2002), especially for countries in the Global South, many universities have also developed exchange programs that aim to broaden the experience of students and staff through study and research in another country (Crisp, 2017). An example of this is the Norwegian Partnership Program for Global Academic Cooperation (NORPART, 2022), which aims to increase international mobility and partnerships with universities in the Global South. This is an important step towards an inclusive program. However, this points to the need to recognize and include different knowledge systems, research methodologies, cultural practices, and values in our research education at universities so that we can prepare students and researchers to be aware of the importance of culture in our research projects and collaborations.

As our universities become more international and educate students from diverse cultural backgrounds, curricula and course content should be designed to prepare social work researchers for these challenges. The Global Statement on the Ethical Principles of Social Work (2018) states:

> *Social work employer organizations and educational and research institutions must work to ensure that infrastructural arrangements and development opportunities are in place to facilitate the achievement of the ethical imperatives. It is not only social workers who must ensure ethical practices; organizations must fulfil their obligations in supporting ethical practices.* (p.2)

Social work is both an international and a local profession (Healy, 2001). Therefore, research education in social work needs to be redesigned to accommodate multiple geographical, socio-political, economic, and cultural differences (O'Leary et al., 2013). In the process of decolonizing research training and methods, academic and ethical principles that have been dominated by Western standards need to be transformed into more culturally sensitive principles that help researchers deal appropriately with different contexts. Theoretical

frameworks need to be eclectic and draw on Indigenous paradigms so that researchers can stretch beyond the prevailing Western-dominated standards. Indigenous scholars argue that the Indigenous lens should be used at all stages of research, including when working with communities to set the research agenda, when questioning the choice of theoretical framework and methods used, and when identifying how research findings can be translated into actions that promote social justice for Indigenous/local communities (Smith, 2012; Zavala, 2013). Indigenous knowledge here refers to the understanding, worldview, and skills developed by communities and passed down from generation to generation over long periods of time (Keane et al., 2016).

There are various philosophical underpinnings around methods that are often ignored in epistemological debates and education, particularly because of disciplinary positioning. For example, some researchers tend to adopt a "positivist view" in research and/or a "constructivist view", while others tend to favor "quantitative" methods over "qualitative" methods. Decolonizing research education and methodology will therefore bring in different ontological and epistemological perspectives, such as Ubuntu philosophy (Seehawer, 2018). Ubuntu prescribes desirable and (communally) acceptable forms of human behavior, and this includes how they should interact with each other (Seehawer, 2018). Mbiti (1969) has illustrated the concept of Ubuntu as follows:

> *Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges, and responsibilities towards himself and other people. The individual can only say: 'I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am.' This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man.* (p.106)

The ontology of many Indigenous peoples states that we are in relationships. Among the truths that emerge from an understanding of relationality, therefore, is that researchers, as relational producers of knowledge, are themselves responsible for maintaining healthy relationships

with the group, the environment, and the ideas they are researching (Wilson, 2008). An Ethiopian proverb also says: “When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion”, reflecting a relational way of thinking like Ubuntu.

It is therefore important to decolonize research education and methodology by focusing on the concerns and worldviews of non-Westerners and respectfully learning and understanding theory and research from the previously “other (ed)” perspective (Datta, 2018; Smith, 2012). This can only be achieved by democratizing the dominant but exhausted knowledge system (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The Global Standard for Social Work Education and Training states that universities should strive to develop curricula that reflect the needs, values, and cultures of their respective populations (Ioakimidis & Sookraj, 2021). The standard also highlights the importance of ensuring that curricula help students to develop critical thinking and openness to new experiences. This is also rooted in Ethiopia's Indigenous knowledge system, which places “wisdom” at the center of a thriving and encourages people to constantly seek wisdom wherever it exists (Woldeyes, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). One of Ethiopia's most renowned philosophers, Zara Yacob, emphasizes the importance of loyalty in critically examining all beliefs and customs (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). In our classrooms, we need to think critically about how we are constantly shaped and interconnected by our history and our current realities (Razack, 2009).

The other important point is that considering research principles and standards from the perspective of the community and groups we are studying is very important because this also benefits our research projects (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). The experience from the PhD study also affirms this argument. In Ethiopian culture, when something is offered, Ethiopians usually extend an invitation several times. Someone is expected to politely decline the gesture first before accepting the second or third offer. This exchange is polite because insisting on the invitation shows hospitality, and the initial refusal shows humility and that

one is not greedy; in Amharic, we call this “megderder”. Being familiar with the cultural norms of Ethiopian society, I had to try to offer some potential participants an invitation to my research project more than once to give them the opportunity to accept it on the second and third attempts. In this way, I attracted two more participants to the Ph.D. project. However, this cultural norm or etiquette is somewhat at odds with the ethical principles I have learned for many years, which is to give free and informed consent and to respect the participants' decision without any coercion. Because of this ethical and cultural dilemma, I was initially very confused and found it difficult to decide which path to take. Working with hard-to-reach groups and desperate for more participants, I eventually followed the cultural protocol and succeeded with some participants. This shows that sometimes considering broad Indigenous and local perspectives is beneficial to research.

Supervision

Supervisors should also contribute to the process of decolonizing research training. One practical strategy that PhD supervisors could use to work towards epistemic justice in research education is “time mapping” (Manathunga et al., 2019). Time mapping is a visual methodology that positions life stories as critical tools for reflexivity in doctoral education. Time mapping uses art and potentially other creative practices to explore the impact of history, geography, and cultural knowledge on our educational and research projects (ibid.). Time mapping is a form of narrative art that can encourage imagination and curiosity and stimulate discussion, all of which are important elements of supervision pedagogy (Manathunga et al., 2019). This method of time mapping can be used in supervision as a starting point to locate and share the intellectual and cultural histories and geographies of students and supervisors, which can then be used to shape the research. By asking students and their supervisors to consciously draw on their cultural knowledge systems, symbols, and languages, they convey that these intellectual and cultural histories and geographies are central to the research process,

not just background (Manathunga et al., 2019).

Critical Reflexivity

Finally, it is essential for qualitative researchers, especially those working with oppressed and underserved groups such as women with incarceration experiences, to examine and decolonize their methodological approach to their research through critical reflexivity. Being reflexive implies engagement in the ongoing process of reflecting ideas and experiences on oneself as an explicit acknowledgment of one's locatedness in the research (Cole & Knowels, 2008). It is a fundamental approach for researchers to decolonize research and examine the researcher's epistemological assumptions, power dynamics, and position concerning the research. Epistemological assumptions determine how one sees the world, organizes oneself within it, what questions one asks, and what answers one seeks (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021).

There are different but interacting dimensions of reflexive processes: personal, interpersonal, and contextual (Walsh, 2003). Personal reflexivity requires researchers to reflect on and clarify their expectations, assumptions and conscious and unconscious responses to contexts, participants, and data (Walsh, 2003). Interpersonal reflexivity refers to how the relationships surrounding the research process influence the context, the people involved and the outcomes (Walsh, 2003). The relationships between researchers and participants are probably the most important. A thoughtful approach to interpersonal reflexivity involves recognizing and valuing participants' unique knowledge and perspectives and attending to their impact on the research process. The final type of reflexivity is contextual reflexivity; it refers to situating a particular project in its cultural and historical context (Walsh, 2003).

We can use different methods to achieve the above dimensions of reflexivity through writing and collaborative reflection. Writing includes forms of documentation such as researcher

memos, field notes and other written or recorded reflections that occur at any point in the research process. The second strategy of reflexivity focuses on collaboration. It recognizes that qualitative researchers rarely reflexively work alone, in isolation from the research team; instead, research collaborators often rely on each other to ask difficult questions about assumptions and make decisions (Francisco et al., 2022).

Limitation

The challenges and dilemmas discussed in this paper are from a decolonizing perspective. However, alternative explanations and understandings may explain the dilemmas the researcher faced during fieldwork, which points to further research and reflexivity to expand our understanding as researchers.

Conclusion

As we live in a globalized 21st century, the intricacy and scale of the world's environmental and social problems require a genuine dialogue between diverse knowledge systems. Today, global coloniality acts as an invisible power environment that shapes and perpetuates unequal power relations between the Global North and the Global South due to stronger economic states and greater influence over the provision of research funding and personnel. This limits the capacity of countries in the Global South, especially in Africa, to act in knowledge production because of the priorities, rules, principles, ethics, and standards already established. Drawing on the experiences of a PhD research project on the lived experience of motherhood after incarceration in Ethiopia, we discussed and reflected on how Western-influenced notions of knowledge and research training sometimes fail to connect meaningfully with local realities and disregard cultural and religious practices in Ethiopia or elsewhere in the context of the Global South through a decolonizing perspective. Our focus was on aspects such as professional boundaries and the responsibilities of researchers, and we

note that while social work education has made progress towards an integrative approach in recent years, research training in our universities still fails to relate meaningfully to the local context and inadequately prepares students and researchers to deal with diverse contexts. This paper, therefore, highlights the need to understand the powerful forces shaping research and the need to support a conscious and ongoing engagement between the currently dominant view and alternative views. By paying attention to Indigenous knowledge and methodologies, we can perhaps take the first step towards redistributing and realigning power so that alternative methodologies and views can be incorporated into our research training. This can be achieved by firstly making curricula more inclusive and through supervisors' active engagement in enhancing students' awareness and skills by encouraging students' critical reflexivity through methods such as time mapping that can be used during supervision sessions to remind students that cultural histories and geographies are central to the research process and not mere background. This will help to produce progressive and inclusive studies that can directly impact local communities and our research participants. This will also inform policy, deepen understanding, and provide evidence for future best practices.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: This review received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data Availability Statement: Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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