

A decolonial perspective and methodology:

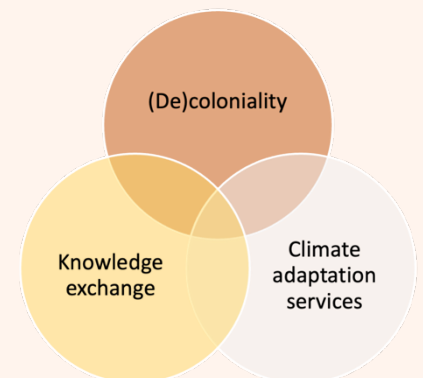
Re-centring people's lived experiences and local realities in climate change adaptation research and practice

Introduction

The way humans think, feel, and experience the exercise of power matters in climate change adaptation research and practice. Climate change adaptation has emerged as a critical agenda in global environmental politics. However, a growing body of interdisciplinary research, particularly from a decolonial perspective, stress that Western scientific institutions and networks have dominated the politics and practice of climate change adaptation. Thus, it is important to shift research attention beyond Western research paradigms and to re-centre people's lived experiences and local realities of climate change adaptation.

Research design

The main knowledge areas of the thesis project comprised of decolonial scholarship, climate services, and knowledge exchange research. Drawing from decolonial scholarship, I developed a theoretical framework that comprised of three decolonial concepts - shifting the geography of reason; focusing on subjectivity; and critical border thinking. Moreover, a decolonial perspective of relationality was integrated into the conceptual design of the thesis. Relationality signifies the interconnection of human and more-than-human relations, while a relational approach is also useful for conceptualising and examining power dynamics at multiple levels and dimensions.



Thesis' three main knowledge areas

Case study and methods

I explored the interrelationship of power, knowledge, and subjectivity from the perspectives and experiences of climate researchers and practitioners who were involved in a project called, "[Stepping-up Knowledge Exchange Between Climate Adaptation Platforms](#)" (KE4CAP). I referred to the KE4CAP project as a case study for examining a global network of researchers and practitioners involved in the development and provision of climate services. In general, the KE4CAP network comprised of more than 200 climate adaptation practitioners, platform developers, operators, and specialists, representing 30 climate adaptation platforms across the globe.

A qualitative and inductive research approach guided research methods. A scoping exercise involved 10 weeks of online participation observation. Subsequently, a total of 18 online semi-structured interviews were conducted in two stages. First, climate researchers and practitioners from different countries in Asia and the Pacific islands region – including India, Japan, Philippines, Samoa, South Korea, and Taiwan were interviewed. The last stage of interviews involved 6 of the researchers comprising the "core KE4CAP team". The decision to first conduct the interviews with the participants of the KE4CAP project before turning to the core KE4CAP team aligned with my decolonial approach of studying from the "borders" of the KE4CAP project and re-centring the perspectives of the individuals inhabiting the "borders"¹.

¹ Mignolo, W. D., & Tlostanova, M. V. (2006). Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo-and Body Politics of Knowledge. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9(2) ,205-221.

Key findings

- Researchers and practitioners involved in climate change adaptation planning and decision-making need to more critically consider how power dynamics affect processes of climate change adaptation.^{2,3}
- Hierarchical power differentials within and between scientific institutions highlighted various decision-making processes that either restricted or facilitated the movement of knowledges relevant to informing adaptation planning and policymaking.
 - For example, international adaptation policy frameworks such as, the UNFCCC's National Adaptation Plan guideline and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14090 document, implemented at national or subnational levels do not necessarily align with the local problems, procedures, and reality of climate change and adaptation of a specific context.
- Power relations between different actors influence which actors are considered valid “knowers”, such as “knowledge producers” and “climate service providers”, versus those who are “knowledge users” or “local or end-users”.
- Design choices of specific research boundaries and research agendas epitomize crucial avenues of re-imagining how we choose to see the world, including how climate researchers and practitioners situate themselves in processes of adaptation decision-making and planning.
- Studying subjectivity and multiple subjectivities is critical for understanding the lived realities of climate change and adaptation.
- A decolonial perspective of relationality and critical border thinking are key for engendering and supporting transformative possibilities in adaptation research and planning.

Conclusions

This research project investigated the subjectivities of climate researchers and practitioners as a way of analysing power dynamics at multiple levels – within and between international research institutions, as well as social and individual dimensions of power. A decolonial perspective grounded the thesis project with an open and a critical basis for highlighting how subjectivities and knowledges are negotiated and contested. Closer attention to the historical timelines, cultural and traditional values of the research participants (be it climate researchers, policymakers, or farmers) will help to enhance the value of this research. This provides the opportunity for future research to build on my decolonial approach and theoretical framework to investigate issues of politics and power in a systematic and holistic manner.

² Nightingale, A., Gonda, N., & Eriksen, S. (2021). Affective adaptation=effective transformation? Shifting the politics of climate change adaptation and transformation from the status quo. *Wires Climate Change*, 13(1).

³ Eriksen, S., Nightingale, A., & Eakin, H. (2015). Reframing adaptation: The political nature of climate change adaptation. *Global Environmental Change*, 35, 523-533.

Glossary

Climate change adaptation is understood as the decision-making processes and actions undertaken by individuals, communities, governments, and other organisations to adjust to present and future socio-ecological shocks, stresses, and changing conditions, including “new regimes of knowledge”⁴.

Colonialism is not simply a past reality of European empires in pursuit of conquest and colonization. The logic and forces of colonialism produce and reproduce various forms of extractivism, violence, discrimination, and social inequalities.

Coloniality refers to the long-standing patterns of power that were shaped by the politics and practices of colonialism.⁵

Critical border thinking denotes a perspective and a field of analysis that denies the epistemic privilege of any knowledge system (be it scientific, indigenous, or local knowledges) over another knowledge system or way of knowing.⁶ Critical border thinking provides a method, a way, of slipping between the borders of coloniality and decoloniality.

Decoloniality denotes to the acknowledgment of the structural injustices of colonial legacies and systems, and the conscious de-linking from privileging Western research paradigms.⁷

Decolonization refers to the liberation and independence of colonized territories from colonial administration. In decolonial scholarship, decolonization is a failed yet on-going project. Movements, such as the Black Lives Matter, feminist, and queer movements exemplify new and emerging understandings of decolonization.

Power has different meanings and interpretations. Rather than trying to identify whether power is a positive or negative thing, a decolonial and a relational understanding of power draws attention to everyday interactions, social practices, and contexts.

Relationality refers to the Spanish word, “vincularidad”, and denotes the interdependent nature of all humans and non-humans on the planet.⁸

Shifting the geography of reason denotes the practice of moving away from objective and neutral principles of modern scientific research. Instead, shifting the geography of reason involves turning our research attention to the context, peoples, and lived experiences from subaltern locations and/or living in marginalized contexts.

Subjectivity is understood as the way in which the individual understands themselves, their worldview, including their knowledges, perception, and lived experiences.⁹

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⁴ Eriksen, S., Nightingale, A., & Eakin, H. (2015). Reframing adaptation: The political nature of climate change adaptation. *Global Environmental Change*, 35, 523.

⁵ Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept. *Cultural studies*, 21(2-3), 240-270.

⁶ Mignolo, W. D., & Tlostanova, M. V. (2006). Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo-and Body Politics of Knowledge. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9(2), 205-221.

⁷ Mignolo, W. D. (2007). Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), 449-514.

⁸ Mignolo, W. & Walsh, C. (2018). *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. New York: Duke University Press.

⁹ Sithole, T. (2014). *Achille Mbembe: Subject, subjection, and subjectivity* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved on 03 November 2022, from https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/14323/thesis_sithole_t.pdf?sequence=1&isAllo wed=y.