# Decoloniality and Information Systems: Making Local Contexts Relevant to IS Research

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## INTRODUCTION

During the colonial era[i], roughly from 1400s to 1914, Europeans "gained control of 84 percent of the globe and they ruled colonies on every other inhabited continent" (Hoffman, 2015, p. 2). Today, 17 colonies remain[ii]. Historians, anthropologists, and sociologists have time and again shown that Eurocentric science and technology played an instrumental role in supporting the political needs of the colonial administration, from Africa (Goody, 1982), and the Indian subcontinent (Kumar, 2006; MacLeod & Kumar, 1995), to the Americas (Vickers, 2008). An unfortunate aspect of colonial project was that the technology transfer from the West to the colonies was made for political purposes. Another more subtle but still critical consequence was that the introduction and application of Eurocentric technologies also directly and indirectly subordinated local epistemologies and Indigenous[iii] thought, making the colonies epistemically dependent on the colonizers. Some colonies gained independence through war (e.g., the 13 American colonies in 1776), but many remained under European control—both politically and ideologically—until well after World War II when war-torn European countries could not afford to maintain tight control over their colonies. As countries gained their independence, many citizens sought to distance themselves from their former colonizers and return to the national and cultural identities, lifestyles, and ways of knowing their ancestors had embraced prior to colonialization. This process is referred to as *decolonialization*.

While *colonialism* refers to the historical period of direct political and economic control by colonial powers, *coloniality* refers to the persistence of colonial power relations, embedded in contemporary institutions, values, social hierarchies, and, importantly for researchers, knowledge. Given that the purpose of colonial enterprise is control, the colonial view of the production of knowledge is "'mentally divorced' from the local setting" in which it operates and ignores "local requirements" and "local knowledge" (Kumar, 2006, pp. 8-12). It attempts to erase local knowledge in every form and replace it with colonial epistemic structures (de Sousa Santos, 2015; Satia, 2020). Thus, dominant Eurocentric epistemologies served as the foundation on which fields of knowledge grew throughout the world. It is not surprising then that one legacy of colonialism is new forms of coloniality vis-à-vis the dominance of Eurocentric thought in academic discourse, including IS academic literature (Banerjee, 2022; Chughtai, 2023).

In this editorial we seek to explain what coloniality is and how it relates to the IS field. We then explain why we organized a special issue on this topic for *Information Systems Journal* (ISJ) and why this journal cares about decoloniality. We provide a brief history of decolonial

research and then introduce its core tenets. From these tenets we develop three criteria for successful decolonial research. Criteria 1 stipulates that decolonial IS researchers engage deeply with the local context. Criteria 2 requires researchers to unpack the focal problem that exists as a legacy of colonialization. Criteria 3 involves the development of a strategy or a solution that is decolonial in nature, meaning it incorporates a local or Indigenous philosophy to restructure or reformulate a problematic colonial structure or practice. After articulating these criteria, we introduce the four papers accepted to the special issue on decoloniality and IS and explain how each of those meet the three criteria. We conclude with a call for decolonial research in the IS field.

## WHY DECOLONIALITY AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS?

Decolonial research provides critique of the entrenched colonial matrix of power, enabling not only the expansion but the fundamental reimagining of scientific knowledge. This approach diverges sharply from traditional methodologies that, despite their claims to neutrality, often reproduce colonial biases and power imbalances. Decolonial researchers consider the colonial influence of conventional frameworks, prompting them to forge knowledge systems that prioritize local knowledge. Unlike traditional methods, which frequently position the researcher as a neutral observer, decolonial research involves active, reciprocal engagement between researcher and participant, especially with voices historically marginalized or silenced (Grosfoguel, 2007; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Here, the act of research becomes an act of mutual transformation, where knowledge production is inseparable from the socio-cultural dynamics in which it unfolds.

Decolonial approaches often have emancipatory goals; they seek not only to understand but to actively transform oppressive structures and foster spaces of conviviality and pluriversality—environments where multiple ways of knowing are valued and can be considered simultaneously, without a colonial hierarchy. A decolonial transformative approach challenges researchers to confront the power structures that underlie the very systems they study. In doing so, they are tasked with cultivating a research environment that does not merely acknowledge diverse perspectives but actively resists homogenization and oversimplification (for example, see de Sousa Santos, 2015; Mohanty, 2003). Decolonial research emerges not just as a method but as a profound intellectual and political exercise involving collective reimagining of IS and through IS.

The task of decolonial research is to undo the doings of colonialism. A complete reversal of these structures is neither realistic nor desirable; thus, decolonial scholarship critically examines the applicability and appropriateness of concepts developed within Eurocentric epistemological frameworks, particularly when these are applied to local contexts with histories of oppression and colonial control. While many insights from Eurocentric thought hold value, decolonial research suggests scrutinizing the contextual relevance of such insights within settings where knowledge relationships have been historically defined by asymmetry and domination, potentially leading to the adoption of Eurocentric knowledge frameworks that do not fit the context. Instead of imposing external frameworks, decolonial research seeks to revive and legitimize local epistemic traditions, knowledge systems, and philosophies that authentically reflect local communities' values, histories, and needs. It involves a deliberate shift toward methodologies and theoretical frameworks rooted in the local, allowing communities to reclaim agency over their knowledge practices. By engaging directly with Indigenous and local intellectual traditions, decolonial research fosters epistemic plurality and strives for an inclusive, transformative, restorative outcomes.

Decolonial research begins with epistemic orientation, where researchers critically examine their positionality and reflexivity, questioning the ontological and epistemological assumptions driving their research. The aim is to cultivate a decolonial relational ethic that critiques,

transforms, and, to some degree, adapts colonial hierarchies of knowledge to meet local needs. In the methodological framework stage, methods are chosen to prioritize reciprocity, co-creation, and accountability to the communities involved. Rather than imposing conventional frameworks, decolonial research aligns with participatory, narrative, and Indigenous methodologies that honor local forms of knowledge, e.g. ancestral and metaphysical. This stage includes extensive consultation with the community to ensure the research aligns with their needs and values. During data collection and analysis, researchers employ methods such as ethnography, participatory design, in-depth case studies, storytelling, oral history, critical hermeneutics, and observation, valuing local insights as legitimate sources of knowledge. Here, analysis prioritizes meaning-making processes rooted in the focal context over external standards of validity and generalizability. Finally, in the dissemination stage, decolonial research replaces extractive models of knowledge sharing. Beyond journal and book publications, findings are often also shared in ways that directly benefit the community. The latter prioritizes non-textual forms, such as oral presentations or community events, thereby closing the research loop in a way that upholds the agency and autonomy of the researched community. Though this sort of research has not traditionally been a focus in ISJ, we see value in adding this perspective to the repertoire of research approaches IS scholars have at their disposal.

## WHY A SPECIAL ISSUE OF ISJ?

We developed this special issue to provide a platform for both novice and experienced researchers seeking to showcase their critical Indigenous and decolonial research. This special issue aims to feature decolonial approaches in IS scholarship, challenging the uncritical acceptance of the dominance of Eurocentric frameworks and opening space for perspectives grounded in local, context-specific knowledge. By encouraging contributions that centre non-European and Indigenous knowledge systems, we hope to promote a more inclusive, nuanced understanding of IS that reflects the communities we serve.

Qualitative IS research has historically overlooked non-European theories and methodologies. Although some IS researchers are increasingly engaging with issues of colonialism, two major challenges remain. First, researchers studying topics related to decoloniality often lack theoretical and methodological tools that fully align with decolonial perspectives. As a result, their work may unintentionally reinforce the Eurocentric frameworks they aim to question. Second, scholars conducting research in decolonial contexts—such as Indigenous communities or non-Western societies—frequently draw on concepts that do not resonate with or accurately reflect local knowledge and historical meanings. An Indigenous community may also contest research findings (for a relevant case of Havasupai, see Dalton, 2004; Garrison, 2013) or interpret the findings differently than the researchers. This is not a critique of scholars working in these contexts but rather a reflection of the limited decolonial resources within our field.

When Eurocentric frameworks dominate, they can perpetuate what decolonial scholars refer to as epistemic violence. This occurs when the authority of Western perspectives is legitimized over local or Indigenous ways of knowing, either because researchers overlook alternative epistemologies or because they lack the means to engage with them effectively. Many foundational concepts in IS research, such as the "IT artifact," were developed within Western contexts. While these concepts may work well in their original settings, they can lose relevance or even take on a distorted meaning in non-Western environments. In some cultures, and languages, there may be no direct translation for such terms. Such translation challenges reveal the inherent limitations of universal conceptualizations. When researchers treat IS concepts as universally applicable, they often fail to account for the unique social, political, and colonial histories that shape other communities' perspectives.

Without critically examining the complex interplay between theory and context, it is easy to assume that widely used concepts are universally valid. Yet, because a legacy of colonialization is the colonialization of knowledge, it is worth considering how that legacy continues to shape research paradigms, including in IS. This special issue is an intentional step toward that end. By shifting the focus to local epistemologies and context-specific methodologies, we hope to foster a research environment that values diverse perspectives and promotes knowledge production across cultures.

## WHY IS DECOLONIALITY IMPORTANT AT ISJ?

Colonial influence permeates research on social sciences, management, technology, and beyond. While Eurocentric philosophies have driven significant progress in these fields, they have also created a systemic imbalance—privileging certain epistemologies and marginalizing others. This result is a false dichotomy that deems Eurocentric knowledge to be "scientific," "serious," and "elite" while disregarding or disparaging local knowledge, such as ancestral wisdom, as "unscientific," "silly," and "inferior." Such disregard of alternative methods of knowing does not benefit society but limits the possible explanations researchers consider, and ultimately, the insights researchers glean.

The Guest Editors of this special issue are critically aware of this false dichotomy and are excited about the advances in knowledge that can stem from a more open-minded and local approach to research. In a case study of India, Datta (2011) describes our field as being "under the yoke of colonial influence," constrained by a persistent epistemic "lock-in" imposed by colonial paradigms (p. 11). We now call for an intentional inclusion of local and Indigenous epistemologies, not simply as supplementary perspectives but as transformative foundations that challenge long-standing assumptions (Chughtai, 2023; Chughtai et al., 2020; Myers et al., 2020; Young, 2018). An important step in this direction involves equipping researchers who often lack the vocabulary to describe the effects of coloniality, even if they sensed its effects. For example, Jansen (1995) studied the diffusion of IT infrastructure in the Finnmark region of Norway. This region is home to the Indigenous *Sami* people[iv]. An important insight from this early study is that it calls for more "Indigenous development" (p. 113) and acknowledges the significance of Indigenous local context in developing digital solutions for Indigenous communities. Another example is the case study of early Internet in Togo (Bernstein & Goodman, 2005). The authors touch upon the effects of colonial legacy and local specificities but stop short of critical engagement.

This pattern reflects a broader disciplinary issue: even when scholars are aware of colonial residues, they lack the theoretical frameworks to interrogate them effectively. The delayed integration of decoloniality has therefore meant missed opportunities for richer insights. As decolonial perspectives gain traction, IS researchers can use them to expand and challenge the epistemic boundaries of our field. Why, after all, should decolonial research remain marginal in a field grappling with global technological impact and the role of technology in globalization? As critical researchers today, we have the tools and language to examine and explain these colonial legacies and to foster a more pluralistic, inclusive intellectual landscape. In the sister discipline of management studies, scholars have suggested that theories and concepts developed using European philosophical apparatuses are often considered to be "authentic and original without a recognition that this knowledge is produced through the political economy of colonialism" (Banerjee, 2022, p. 1074). At ISJ, like other top journals, researchers are beginning to look at the local contexts with an openness to expanding local knowledge; some examples include studies of Ubuntu value systems in digital entrepreneurship (Abubakre et al., 2021), cultural re-presentation and re-affirmation of Māori IT professionals (Díaz Andrade et al., 2021), and subaltern approaches to ICT4D (Khene &

Masiero, 2022; Masiero, 2022). In order to empower more research in this vein, we now provide a brief history of decolonial research.

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF DECOLONIAL RESEARCH

Early academic work on decolonialization (e.g., Fanon, 1966; Nkrumah, 1970; Rodney, 1974) advocated for the therapeutic effect of violence, called for a new world order, and articulated raw emotions around trauma and a thirst for revenge (Betts, 2012). By the late 1970s, academic literature on decolonialization shifted toward neo-colonialism (Betts, 2012). Academic critiques of both colonial impacts and decolonial thought became more nuanced and practical (e.g., Amin, 1977 ; Frank, 1979; Yansané, 1980), expanding beyond emotional and cultural impacts to include and discuss economic impacts of colonialization (wa Thiong'o, 1986), social justice (Cusicanqui, 2020, 2023; Tuck & Yang, 2012), and ecology and climate (Ferdinand, 2021). The United Nations General Assembly declared the 1990s to be "the international decade for the eradication of colonialism" (Betts, 2012, p. 26) as liberated countries formalized their decolonialization efforts.

Today, the academic decoloniality literature is vast and diverse. For example, research on nutrition decolonialization discusses the health and ecological implications of returning to Indigenous diets and agricultural practices such as planting native seeds rather than relying heavily on European staples (Calderón Farfán et al., 2021; Hassel et al., 2019). In education, decolonial methods aid communities that seek to return to traditional practices and locally relevant curriculum (Bhambra et al., 2018; Zavala, 2016). Decolonial management research addresses how colonial 'modes of domination' appear in the workplace and how open systems approaches can contextualize management theories (Banerjee, 2022, p. 1080). In information systems, decolonial research addresses a variety of phenomena including digital innovation (Jimenez et al., 2022), ICT4D (Khene & Masiero, 2022), the digital divide (Moyo, 2017), artificial intelligence (Mohamed et al., 2020), queer interpretations of Two-Spirited[v] peoples' digital content (Coe, 2023), and digital marginalization (Chaka, 2022). These studies can be recognized as decolonial based on their engagement with certain tenets of decolonial research.

# WHAT ARE THE CORE TENETS OF DECOLONIAL RESEARCH?

Decolonial research rejects prescriptive principles and cannot be universally defined. There is no single underlying philosophy, but it falls under the umbrella of critical research (Young, 2023). It is important to note that decolonial scholarship is sometimes critical of traditional critical and post-colonial approaches because those traditions often operate within Western epistemological frameworks (Chughtai, 2023). Decolonial researchers, in contrast, often follow what Smith (2012) refers to as a "local approach to critical theory" (p. 242). Specifically, a decolonial project may involve efforts by researchers to not only recognize but dismantle structures of colonial epistemic domination, and foreground marginalized, Indigenous, and local knowledge systems. While certain tenets frequently emerge in the decolonial literature, decolonial scholarship warns against rigidly applying these across contexts (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Smith, 2012). Instead, it encourages researchers to discern which of these tenets are relevant to their unique settings. Below we highlight some of the tents of decoloniality.

## Colonial Matrix of Power

*Colonial Matrix of Power* (CMP) is a key concept of decolonial research. Early work by the Peruvian Sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000, 2007) laid a foundation for research on coloniality and power, which was later built upon by decolonial scholars (Grosfoguel, 2002; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). CMP research focuses on demonstrating how coloniality persists beyond the

formal end of colonial administrations. Ramón Grosfoguel (2007) conceptualizes coloniality and the colonial matrix of power thusly:

> "One of the most powerful myths of the twentieth century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world. This led to the myth of a 'postcolonial' world. The heterogeneous and multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years did not evaporate with the juridical-political decolonization of the periphery over the past 50 years. We continue to live under the same 'colonial power matrix.' With juridical-political decolonization we moved from a period of 'global colonialism' to the current period of 'global coloniality.'" (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 219).

Theories of CMP look beyond physical or political control to show how colonial structures continue to impact the production and transmission of knowledge by suppressing critical consciousness, promoting dominant colonial epistemologies, and rejecting local or Indigenous perspectives. There are four critical aspects of the CMP (Quijano, 2007):

1. Control of Authority: The privileging of European political, legal, and military structures to control power dynamics.

2. Control of Economy: The privileging of European economic structures to control labor practices and resource allocation.

3. Control of Gender and Sexuality: The privileging of European relational and familial structures to control domestic practices.

4. Control of Knowledge and Subjectivity: The privileging of European epistemologies and knowledge production to exert ideological control.

CMP theorizes the continuity of colonial forms of domination in the so-called "post-colonial" era. Decolonial researchers utilize the CMP framework to analyze and critique the ongoing impacts of coloniality on various aspects of contemporary life, such as technology, education, and global power structures.

## Universality of Concepts

The *universality of concepts* refers to the assumption that concepts, particularly those originating from European thought, are neutral, objective, and applicable across diverse social and cultural contexts (Chughtai, 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, pp. 48-55). Decolonial critiques challenge this assumption, arguing that the assertion of universal concepts is often rooted in Eurocentric knowledge systems that delegitimize non-European knowledge and perspectives (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Mignolo (2007) refers to this as "tyranny of abstract universals" (p. 159), a form of epistemic violence. Decolonial scholars emphasize the importance of positionality, arguing that concepts are produced from specific locations within the colonial matrix of power, making their claim to universality problematic (Grosfoguel, 2017).

In contrast, *pluriversality* challenges the notion of a universal culture and knowledge system by positing that multiple ontologies coexist, each with their own valid ways of knowing, being, and doing. Escobar (2018) connects this concept to the Zapatista idea of "a world where many worlds fit," directly contrasting the popular "One-World World" perspective that imposes a singular, globalized way of thinking and living (p. xvi). Pluriversality is not merely a theoretical concept but an analytical tool. Embracing pluriversality in research requires a shift in thinking such that diverse forms of knowledge and ways of life are valued.

## Epistemic Delinking

*Epistemic delinking* in decolonial research involves an intentional break from Eurocentric frameworks, facilitating a shift toward localized, Indigenous epistemologies (Amin, 1990;

Cusicanqui, 2012; Mignolo, 2011). This delinking is a critical act of refusal, challenging the hegemony of European thought and unsettling the coloniality embedded in knowledge production. More than adding diversity within European frameworks, epistemic delinking asks researchers to reconstruct the foundations of knowledge itself, advocating for alternative conceptualizations that emerge from lived experiences and Indigenous cosmologies. Thus, epistemic delinking involves that active advocacy for the epistemic independence of the local. It is a move toward a decoloniality that recognizes, values, and engages local ontologies on their own terms without undue influence by the epistemic hierarchies that have historically overshadowed local ways of knowing.

## Local and Indigenous Epistemologies

Decolonialization involves the recognition of Indigenous and local epistemologies, which often prioritize interconnectedness, respect, and reciprocity. These epistemologies may hold insights relevant to global challenges. For instance, local ecological practices may be key in reducing the effects of climate change[vi]. Locating and positioning research in local contexts expands the scope of scholarly knowledge by resisting homogenizing academic tropes and promoting sustainable, place-based insights. Approaching research with a commitment to the local context ensures that the produced knowledge authentically reflects the lived experiences of local groups, fostering outcomes that are more accurate, ethical, and reflective of community needs (Connell, 2014). Moreover, by focusing on local contexts, researchers can address instances of dominant methodologies marginalizing or erasing Indigenous ways of knowing.

## Colonial Difference

*Colonial difference* refers to the power dynamics instituted by colonialism that continue to shape relationships between colonizers and the colonized, extending well beyond the formal end of colonial rule (Grosfoguel, 2002). These dynamics influence various aspects of social life, including culture, gender roles, labor, interpersonal relationships, and knowledge production (e.g., Kerr, 2020; Manning, 2021). The concept of colonial difference is central to the broader theoretical framework of coloniality, which examines the ongoing impact of colonial structures, practices, and ideologies in shaping the modern world. Colonial difference produces a variety of experiences and perspectives. It acknowledges that the impacts of colonialism are neither uniform nor monolithic but instead produce distinct experiences, often determined by local contexts. It also emphasizes the diverse ways in which colonized communities have resisted, adapted to, and reshaped colonial influences, while continuing to struggle for decolonialization and the consideration of alternative worldviews and ways of life.

## Epistemological Violence

*Epistemological violence* occurs when a focal group is harmed (often economically, psychologically, socially, or physiologically) because researchers used motivated reasoning to develop theory or interpret data in a way that suggests the group is inferior or problematic despite equally plausible alternative explanations (Teo, 2010). This harm may be inflicted by denying the agency, knowledge, competence, experiences, or perspectives of focal group members. When the colonized group's skills, beliefs, and resources are devalued or decommissioned, it is easier for the colonizing group to dominate local thinking and values. For instance, when local languages, traditions, and practices are lost, they will be replaced by a colonial version, further empowering the colonial group to dominate the colonized group.

## Emancipation

*Emancipation* entails the freedom to act, think, express, and belong (Young et al., 2021). These freedoms enable people to live up to their potential (Shaw & Stahl, 2011, p. 255). When individuals lack basic freedoms, negative outcomes include oppression, marginalization, domination, and de-voicing (Young et al., 2021). In colonial contexts, both the colonized and

the colonizers are constrained by the oppressive societal dynamic. The colonized experience oppression when their dignity is challenges by hierarchical ideologies that suggest they have less intrinsic value or humanity than members of the colonizing group. It is easy for most people to perceive the oppression of the colonized group, but a hidden, sinister effect of colonization is that the colonizing group also experiences a type of oppression when people become constrained in their thinking and adopt a world view that alienates them from the potential benefits of dignity-preserving relationships with people from the colonized group (see Freire, 2000; also Kane et al., 2021). The colonizers risk becoming two-dimensional caricatures and will also fail to live up to their potential if they embrace self-concepts of superiority or lifestyles of violence.

Post-colonial theory suggests that there are practical steps the colonized and colonizers can take to move themselves and their societies toward emancipation. This emancipation process involves people working together to free themselves and each other (Freire, 2000) by gaining understanding of how people are oppressed, identifying a potent societal problem that is contributing to this oppression, determining who or what institution holds the power to fix the focal problem, and working together to enact a solution (Young, 2018). While post-colonial emancipation research focuses on how to enact solutions within the existing post-colonial social structure, decolonial emancipation research goes further by enacting solutions that dissolve an existing societal structure and rebuilds it in a way that reflects how the society might have unfolded if colonialization had never occurred. Post-colonial research suggests that early efforts to promote emancipation aimed to reverse the roles of the oppressed and the oppressors rather than emancipate all members of society. As researchers began to move toward decolonialization, this same pattern emerged, and researchers advocated for violence and role reversal. However, as this stream of research matures, efforts to promote emancipation in a decolonial manner are increasingly synergistic and collaborative.

## Epistemic and Decolonial Justice

While distributive justice research often focuses on tangible resource, injustices involving intangible resources such as information are also of concern to decolonial researchers, and of particular interest to IS scholars. *Epistemic justice,* in the context of decoloniality, refers to the valuing of the epistemic capabilities of members of the colonized group. Epistemic injustice is theorized to negatively affect society by inhibiting knowledge transfer, disincentivizing the undertaking of epistemic endeavours, and limiting public discourse (Fricker, 2007). One decolonial approach to achieving epistemic justice is storytelling by elders and local community members whose experiences and knowledge may run counter to the neoliberal epistemes of the institutions (e.g., universities) that dominate the production of knowledge in colonized societies (Dutta et al., 2022). Justice is a complex and multifaceted concept that applies to many aspects of life and can be conceptualized in a variety of ways. In addition to social and epistemic justice, other types of justice and injustice such as commutative, legal, restorative, and political, require consideration by decolonial researchers. Efforts to promote *decolonial justice* may encompass many types of justice with the goal of not only promoting justice for colonized or formerly colonized peoples, but also decolonializing dominant understanding of what justice means and how it should play out in society.

## THREE CRITERIA FOR SUCCESSFUL DECOLONIAL IS RESEARCH

There is no blueprint for conducting and doing decolonial research. However, building on the discussion of decolonial tenets above, we now develop a foundation for thinking about what is required in a decolonial project. This foundational framework provided the criteria by which submission to the special issue were evaluated.

Criteria 1: Decolonial approaches require the researcher to *engage deeply with the local context*. Researchers must immerse themselves in Indigenous knowledge systems, local philosophies, and histories specific to their study, as these insights are foundational to a truly decolonial approach. By actively engaging with local contexts, researchers move beyond generalizations and avoid imposing external frameworks. This immersion ensures the work is contextually relevant and respects the epistemic sovereignty of the communities involved, building a foundation for ethically grounded, transformative scholarship. To meet this criterion, researchers can work to understand the colonial matrix of power, question the universality of concepts, engage in epistemic delinking, and familiarize themselves with local and Indigenous epistemologies.

Criteria 2: Decolonial research must begin by explicitly clarifying the colonial legacy it seeks to disrupt. It is important to *unpack the focal problem* and answer the questions: decolonialization of what and for whom? Fulfilling this criterion requires researchers to explain which colonial structure or practice is enforcing an oppressive status-quo of epistemological violence and how. That is, the research can meet this criterion by investigating the nature of the colonial difference experienced by the focal community as well as the contributing factors that perpetuate colonial difference.

Criteria 3: Decolonial research is impactful when the researchers *develop a strategy or solution* that can be implemented to restructure or reformulate the problematic colonial structure or practice to align with the local or Indigenous philosophy that they identified as helpful during their deep engagement with the local context. Establishing a clear, decolonial strategy or solution is not merely a theoretical exercise; it serves as a guardrail against outcomes that fall short of addressing epistemic injustice or even reproduce colonial hierarchies of knowledge. Ideally, decolonial research should help all members of society achieve gradients of emancipation by promoting epistemic justice.

## INTRODUCING THE SPECIAL ISSUE PAPERS

Fourteen manuscripts were submitted in response to our call for papers and four successfully met the criteria above to be included in the special issue. Each of these papers contributes to a growing understanding of how IS researchers can engage with communities in post-colonial contexts to promote emancipation and epistemic justice by valuing local insights.

In the first paper, Zubler et al. (2025) focus on decolonializing IT governance in international non-governmental organizations (iNGOs). They address the problem of Western-centric IT governance structures in iNGOs that can perpetuate colonial power dynamics and fail to account for the needs and perspectives of local communities in the Global South. The study draws on Ubuntu philosophy as a decolonial framework. Ubuntu emphasizes community, interdependence, and shared responsibility. The authors use a design science research approach to develop organizing principles for decolonializing IT governance. This involves identifying ideal principles based on Ubuntu and then adapting them to account for operational constraints. The study contributes to decolonial scholarship by proposing concrete steps to decolonialize IT governance in iNGOs. It moves beyond critique to offer practical guidance for creating more equitable and inclusive IT governance structures. Their work advances the field by highlighting the importance of considering power dynamics and local knowledge in IT governance and offering a potential solution based on an Indigenous philosophy.

In the second paper, Frimpong et al. (2025) examine the cultural tensions that arise when Western-designed digital crowdfunding platforms are deployed in Indigenous communities, using the Kenyan tradition of Harambee as a case study. This paper addresses the potential for digital crowdfunding to contribute to a form of digital colonialism by marginalizing Indigenous cultures and elevating Western norms. Harambee, meaning "all pull together" in

Swahili, is presented as a decolonial philosophy emphasizing communal values such as inclusive access, mutual recognition and reciprocity, and collaborative networks. The study employs a qualitative approach, using narrative interviews with Kenyan participants to understand how these values intersect with digital crowdfunding practices. Their work contributes to decolonial scholarship by highlighting the potential for Harambee to inform the design and implementation of digital crowdfunding platforms that are more culturally responsive and inclusive. They contribute to decolonial scholarship in the field by advocating for integrating Indigenous knowledge and practices in the development of technologies to ensure that digital innovation does not come at the expense of cultural diversity.

In the third paper, Jimenez et al. (2025) examine a co-produced IS intervention, the Metropolitan Water Observatory (MWO) in Lima, Peru, through a decolonial lens. It addresses the problem of Western-centric IS interventions that may not adequately account for local knowledge systems and power dynamics. The study uses the concepts of pluriverse and conviviality as decolonial frameworks. The pluriverse recognizes the existence of multiple and diverse worldviews, while conviviality emphasizes ethical and respectful relationships between diverse groups. The authors re-analyze the MWO project through these concepts, focusing on ontological, epistemological, methodological, and justice dimensions. The study contributes to decolonial scholarship by applying these frameworks to analyze the MWO and provides insights into how decolonial IS interventions can be designed and implemented. They offer a framework to examine IS interventions from a decolonial perspective and propose practical guidelines for researchers interested in using decolonial approaches in IS research.

In the final paper, Sanches et al. (2025) focus on the development of a solidarity cryptocurrency in a Brazilian favela to explore decolonializing IS research and practice through the lens of *tecnologia social*. The study addresses the problem of the dominant Western, Eurocentric perspective in IS that often overshadows alternative epistemologies and perpetuates historical inequalities by silencing philosophies of the less developed world in knowledge creation. The authors use a design ethnography methodology to examine how the *tecnologia social* approach, prominent in Latin America, deals with epistemic plurality and resulting epistemic tensions in both research and practice. *Tecnologia social* advocates for epistemic justice and plurality by proposing that tensions are not resolved by suppressing or eliminating cultural differences. It centers Indigenous traditions, with their local actors, local resources, and local knowledge, in any developmental process. The study contributes to decolonial scholarship by introducing *tecnologia social* to the IS community. It also highlights how the inherent tensions from the coexistence of diverse epistemologies in a pluriversal world can be navigated in IS research and practice, favoring often-silenced communities. Their work contributes to the field by suggesting that *tecnologia social* and epistemic dialogical tension provide fertile ground for developing decolonialized approaches where multiple epistemologies coexist.

## CONCLUSION

It is our hope that this special issue will encourage future research that identifies suboptimal or oppressive structures and practices that are a legacy of colonialization and works to replace them with structures and practices that better align with the values and needs of the local community. Such research should identify not only how colonial legacies are embedded in or detrimental to IS design, development, implementation, and use, but also how IS can be used as a tool for implementing emancipatory and justice-oriented decolonial solutions. We end with a note of caution that any such research should be done with utmost humility, acknowledging complex social systems and epistemologies that may compete or conflict and the respective value of each. We urge researchers not to settle for simplistic conceptualizations of local or colonial value systems, and not to seek to reverse power

dynamics such that the oppressed become oppressors. Rather, we encourage IS researchers to strive for solutions that emancipate all members of a society by introducing structures and practices that are most appropriate for the local context. In the past, evaluation of designs and strategies for structuring society has been biased toward Eurocentric models without adequate consideration of the models put forth by local people. We encourage future researchers to consider multiple alternative ways of knowing—some local and some colonial—without disregarding either. This will empower researchers to act toward decoloniality when the local ideas genuinely provide the best path forward for society.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## ENDNOTES

[i] Abernethy (2000) says the European colonial expansion started as early as 1415 with "the Portuguese capture of Ceuta" (p. 45).

[ii] According to a recent United Nations' report, 80 former colonies have gained independence since 1945; but 17 territories are still under some form of colonial rule. Decolonization is also integral to the UN SDG 10 and 16, promoting peace, justice, and inclusive institutions by addressing historical inequities and fostering self-determination. See https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/decolonization

[iii] The term Indigenous should not be confused with indigenous. When referring to Indigenous topics, it is important to capitalize "I" as a sign of respect (Younging, 2018). According to the latest APA guidelines: "Capitalize "Indigenous" and "Aboriginal" whenever they are used. Capitalize "Indigenous People" or "Aboriginal People" when referring to a specific group (e.g., the Indigenous Peoples of Canada), but use lowercase for "people" when describing persons who are Indigenous or Aboriginal (e.g., "the authors were all Indigenous people but belonged to different nations")." See https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities

[iv] It is important to note that Jansen's study made direct and frequent references to Indigenous tribes and communities, but did not identify them by name in any case. For more in-depth recent discussion of decoloniality in the Nordic regions, see Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe (2023).

[v] The decolonial concept of Two-Spirit is developed using a direct translation of the *Anishinaabemowin* term, *niizh manidoowag*, which means "two spirits" – see https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/two-spirit. We want to highlight and acknowledge that the term Two-Spirits has different meaning and interpretation in different Indigenous communities of First Nations of North Americas. Thus, we warn that scholars should resist homogenizing Indigenous concepts and indeed diverse Indigenous communities as monolithic group with one philosophy. For an in-depth discussion, see Cox (2015) and Scudeler (2020).

[vi] Indigenous knowledge and climate change, see https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/indigenous-knowledge-crucial-fight-against-climate-change-heres-why

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