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## A Decolonial Feminist Ethnography: Empowerment, ethics and epistemology

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**Abstract:** A decolonial feminist ethnography is an empowering, ethically engaged methodology that can address the complexities of the lived world and the complications of power in research to bring forward different worldviews, knowledges and lived experiences. Integrating decolonial feminist theory into a critical ethnography can help achieve epistemological decolonisation by enabling researchers to engage in research that challenges inequality, power and politics, and recognises the intersections of voice, place and privilege throughout the research process. In practice, this is a performed ethnography, whereby empowerment comes from the space created between the researcher and participants, where the researcher moves with the participants and engages in a dialogic performance. This chapter provides insight into the theoretical development of this methodological approach, and then, moving beyond the theory, shares how the author used the embodied performances of moving and listening to engage in a dialogue with indigenous Maya women, where power was shared and knowledge produced together.

**Keywords:** decolonial theory, decolonial feminism, critical ethnography, reflexivity, preformed ethnography

# 3

## A DECOLONIAL FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHY

### Empowerment, ethics and epistemology

*Jennifer Manning*

#### Introduction

A decolonial feminist ethnography is an empowering research methodology that can situate the knowledge, lived experiences and worldviews of ‘others’ who are often marginalised in management research, thought and practice. This methodology focuses on the importance of ethics and epistemology in shaping the methods of knowledge production while striving for empowerment in the research process. A decolonial feminist ethnography is a messy, bricolaged way of doing research. It is also an empowering methodology that draws attention to differences, inequalities and ‘otherness’. Reconfiguring critical ethnography to recognise the colonality of power, a decolonial feminist ethnography enables researchers to consider and address the ethical and political implications of research and knowledge production.

I developed a decolonial feminist ethnography when undertaking my doctoral research. My research explored the work and lives of marginalised, indigenous Maya women working together in backstrap weaving groups in rural, remote Highland communities in Guatemala. Having previously lived in Guatemala while spending two formative years living, working and travelling through East Asia, the South Pacific, Central America and the Caribbean, I was profoundly impacted by how much I learnt from the various people and cultures throughout this experience. From complex worldviews, to challenging lived experiences, to alternative ways of working and organising, I came to a realisation that my worldviews were built upon an ontology of

modernity that did not adequately recognise the work, lives and knowledge of 'others'. There is limited empirical engagement *with* marginalised, indigenous women in the Global South within management and organisation studies. Located outside the dominant Western discourse, little is known about how they construct their identity and their work/organisational experiences. Traditional ethnographies reinforce imperialist tendencies and epistemic violence, and produce authoritative, descriptive studies about 'others' ([Foley, 2002](#); [Madison, 2012](#)). However, from my experiences, I found that it is only through dialogue, which requires listening as much as talking, we can advance mutual understanding.

Developing a decolonial feminist ethnography enabled me, a white, European (Irish) woman, to engage with the politics of power and positionality in the research process so as to create space for marginalised Maya women to voice their own understanding of gender, identity and work from within the context of their social, cultural and historical location. This approach to research encourages researchers to strive towards being ethically and reflexively engaged throughout the research process. I continually tried to be ethically mindful and reflexive in my engagements with the Maya women participants in order to understand how I experienced our relationship and to know how to (re)present the women and their knowledge. Thus, a decolonial feminist ethnography highlights the need to consider deeply the personal, political and ethical considerations of research. I used the embodied performances of listening and moving to address the politics of power and positionality inherently embedded in the research process and to continually try to ensure I was ethically and reflexively engaged with the Maya women participants.

This chapter will first provide insight into the theory underpinning this methodological approach. I start with a brief theoretical overview of decolonial feminist theory and then draw out its relationship to critical ethnography. I discuss *how* a decolonial feminist ethnography can produce different forms of knowledge/ways of knowing in management and organisation studies by engaging in research *with* those who are often 'othered' and left in the margins of management thought and practice. Following this, moving beyond the theory, I explore the *doing* of decolonial feminist research. By drawing on my doctoral research experience, I share how I used the embodied performances of listening and moving to engage in a dialogue with the Maya women participants where power was shared and knowledge produced together. I then close this chapter by drawing out how a decolonial feminist ethnography is an empowering methodology and can contribute to the growing discourse on empowering ways of doing research.

In undertaking research and producing knowledge *with* 'others' in the Global South, researchers need to continually try to ensure that they are not

implicit in perpetuating the conditions of inequality or power domination in the research process, or the potential silencing of participants knowledge and voice, and reproducing their 'otherness'. This chapter makes a contribution to management research by providing insight, in both theory and practice, of an alternative, empowering way of undertaking research that is underpinned by an ethical commitment to participants by means of decolonising ourselves and the research process.

## Understanding decolonial feminist theory

The theoretical and epistemological origins of decolonial feminism provide insights into how a decolonial feminist ethnography is an empowering methodology that can produce different forms of knowledge/ways of knowing. First, beginning with an introduction to decolonial theory, which is founded in the modernity/coloniality dialogues between prominent Latin American scholars. The work of [Mignolo \(2007, 2009, 2011\)](#), [Escobar \(2007, 2010\)](#), Dussel ([Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, 2006](#)) and [Quijano \(2000, 2007\)](#), among others, founded decolonial theory by critiquing Eurocentric modernity and claims of universality. Dussel and [Ibarra-Colado \(2006\)](#) explain modernity as a phenomenon that denotes the sociocultural centrality of Europe from the moment the Americas were discovered. Modernity refers to the crystallisation of discourses, practices and institutions that have developed over the past few hundred years from European ontological and cultural colonisation ([Ceci Misoczky, 2011](#); [Escobar, 2010](#)). [Escobar \(2010\)](#) explains that the world and all knowledges constructed on the basis of an ontology of modernity became universal, and this universal ontology has gained dominance over certain worldviews, institutions, constructs and practices. Decolonial theorists argue that the idea of the universality of a Western ontology is based on the displacement of those in the Global South from the effective history of modernity. As a result, history becomes a product of the West, and modernity became synonymous with the West by displacing the actions, ideas and knowledge of those in the Global South. In so doing, Western modernity created the 'other'. The 'other' are those who do not fit the profile of modernity, that is, persons and cultures that are considered non-modern. The postcolonial theorist [Spivak \(1988\)](#) uses the term 'subaltern' to emphasise the position of the marginalised 'other', which refers to those socially, politically and geographically outside the dominant power structures.

Decolonial theorist [Quijano \(2000, 2007\)](#) developed the coloniality of power concept, which helps us understand how the knowledge, lived experiences and worldviews of the 'other' remain in the margins. The coloniality of power is the interrelation of four domains of power and control: control of economy (e.g., land appropriation, exploitation of labour, control

of natural resources), control of authority (e.g., government, institution, army), control of gender and sexuality (e.g., family, education) and control of subjectivity and knowledge (e.g., epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity). [Quijano \(2007\)](#) argues that the colonality of power is the persistent categorical and discriminatory discourse that is reflected in the social and economic structures of modern post-colonial societies. The colonality of power simultaneously dismantles ‘other’ knowledges, social organisation and ways of life ([Mignolo, 2007](#)). Modernity and colonality are mutually dependent phenomena; colonality refers to ‘the pattern of power which has emerged as a result of colonialism’ and is an explicit strategy of epistemological control and domination ([Ceci Misoczky, 2011](#), 347). As explained by [Mignolo \(2007, 162\)](#), ‘modernity, capitalism and colonality are aspects of the same package of control of economy and authority, of gender and sexuality, of knowledge and subjectivity’. Colonality/modernity has created the culturally, socio-economically and politically marginalised ‘other’ of the Global South. As a result, the knowledge and practice of the ‘other’ remain in the margins of the social sciences, and management and organisation studies in particular.

Decolonial theory is thinking that emerges from and within the margins ([Ibarra-Colado, 2006](#)). This theoretical perspective calls for the decolonisation of knowledge so the epistemologies of those in the Global South, particularly those with subalternised racial/ethnic/religious/gendered spaces and bodies, can be taken seriously and moved from the periphery ([Grosfoguel, 2007](#)). In summary, decolonial theory can be understood as broadening non-Western modes of thought and ways of ‘seeing and doing’ while simultaneously demanding the acceptance of marginalised, different and alternative ontologies, epistemologies and worldviews ([Escobar, 2007](#)), or as put by ([Bhambra, 2014](#), 120):

Decoloniality [is] only made necessary as a consequence of the depredations of colonialism, but in [its] intellectual resistance to associated forms of epistemological dominance [it] offers more than simple opposition. [Decolonial theory] offers . . . the possibility of a new geopolitics of knowledge.

Understanding decolonial theory was my first step in implementing a decolonial feminist ethnography as it enabled me to understand how the knowledge, lived experiences and worldviews of the ‘other’ have been marginalised in mainstream academic discourse. However, as my research was engaging with the lived experiences of marginalised ‘other’ women, it was important to both me and the Maya women participants to integrate a feminist perspective. Thus, my next step was to explore decolonial feminist theory and integrate this into the development of my ethnography.

Few of the founders of decolonial theory directly acknowledge gender ([Harding, 2016](#); [Lugones, 2008, 2010](#); [Paludi et al., 2019](#)). Decolonial feminism is an emerging theoretical concept led by [Lugones \(2008, 2010\)](#) that centres on decolonial theory in racial/gendered feminist context. Decolonial feminism engages with debates pertaining to coloniality/modernity and Global South indigenous identity and gender, while also providing a space for the voices and experiences of marginalised ‘other’ women ([Bhambra, 2014](#); [Lugones, 2010](#); [Schiwy, 2007](#)). Much research ‘explains’ women as if the reality of White, Western, middle-class women applies to women from all cultures, classes, races and religions of the world ([Anzaldúa, 2007](#); [Mohanty, 1988, 2003](#); [Parpart, 1993](#)). Limited empirical engagement with marginalised women in the Global South perpetuates their ‘otherness’, and little is known about marginalised, indigenous, poor, Black/Brown, non-Westernised women: their voices are eclipsed by discourses *about* them ([Espinosa Miñoso et al., 2014](#)). Decolonial feminist theorising seeks to provide space for the silenced voices of women to speak of their identities, lived experiences and worldviews.

## **Decolonial feminist theory and critical ethnography**

Now, with this brief synoptic understanding of decolonial feminism, I shift the context towards the transitioning of this theoretical lens into an empowering methodology. I integrate decolonial feminist theory into critical ethnography to create a decolonial feminist approach to research. Critical ethnography provides space to produce rich accounts of the field, as well the space to engage with the voices, perspectives and narratives of those who have been marginalised ([Foley, 2002](#); [Guba and Lincoln, 1994](#); [Kincheloe, 2001](#); [Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005](#); [Madison, 2012](#); [Till, 2009](#)), while creating a dialogical relationship between the researcher and participants ([Foley, 2002](#); [Madison, 2012](#)) by fostering conversation and reflection ([Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005](#)). Understanding the ‘other’ is one of the primary motivations for doing ethnographic research ([Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012](#)); however, the desire of researchers to know the ‘other’ and invite them to speak is a potential source of dominance ([Manning, 2018](#)). In the early stages of developing my decolonial feminist ethnography, I spent much time reflecting on the question posed by [Kincheloe et al. \(2015, 171\)](#): ‘How can researchers respect the perspective of the “other” and invite the “other” to speak?’. To address this complexity, I needed a methodology that moved beyond a well-intentioned critical ethnography towards one that would encourage me at all times to accept the knowledge, worldviews and lived experiences of the ‘other’ without imposing a Western ontology of modernity, while also enabling me to engage with ‘others’ without perpetuating their ‘otherness’.



To this end, I integrated the epistemology of decolonial feminist theory into the methodology of critical ethnography. This is a bricolaged approach to research which understands research as an eclectic process that takes place in a complex lived world and positions the researcher in the research process ([Denzin and Lincoln, 1999](#)). A decolonial feminist ethnography explicitly encourages the researcher to acknowledge and address the politics of positionality and power. The researchers' identity, position, privilege and power in fieldwork affect all aspects of the research process. In traditional ethnographies the researcher is in a position of power in relation to the knowledge that is produced, the representation of participation and the participant's knowledge. Thus, power relations are embedded in ethnography, which can produce imperialist tendencies in representing participants and their knowledge and thereby collude with structures of domination ([Fine, 1994](#); [Manning, 2018](#); [Said, 1993](#)). Western academics often claim epistemological authority over the 'other' by suggesting that they must be represented as they cannot represent themselves ([Manning, 2018](#); [Said, 1978](#); [Spivak, 1988](#)). As a result, researchers claim to know and speak for the 'other' and take ownership of the knowledge produced.

Integrating decolonial theory into a critical ethnography enables us to open up space 'for the reconstruction and the restitution of silenced histories, repressed subjectivities, subalternized knowledge and languages' and emphasises the need for the de-coloniality of power and knowledge ([Mignolo, 2007](#), 451; [Ceci Misoczky, 2019](#); [Quijano, 2000, 2007](#)). A decolonial feminist ethnography can help achieve epistemological decolonisation by enabling researchers contribute to social liberation by engaging in research that challenges inequality and domination in the research process ( [Ceci Misoczky, 2019](#); [Quijano, 2007](#)). This research approach advocates for researchers to consider the political and ethical implications of their research and encourages a dialogic performance between researcher and participants where power is shared and knowledge produced together ([Manning, 2018](#)). This is what decolonial feminist Lugones (1987 637) refers to as 'world travelling' and 'loving perception':

The reason why I think that travelling to someone's 'world' is a way of identifying with them is because by travelling to their 'world' we can understand what it is to be them [*sic*] and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. Without knowing the other's 'world', one does not know the other, and without knowing the other one is really alone in the other's presence because the other is only dimly present to one. Through travelling to other people's 'worlds' we discover that there are 'worlds' in which those who are the victim of arrogant perception are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions even though in

the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceived and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable.

To collate, a decolonial feminist ethnography is a bricolage approach to research that asserts an understanding that ‘the positioning of the researcher in the social web of reality is essential to the production of rigorous and textured knowledge’ ([Kincheloe, 2005, 119](#)). In this way, bricolage encourages decolonial feminist ethnographers to address the complexities of the lived world and the complications of power ([Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005](#)), thereby enabling researchers to better conceptualise the complexity of the research act ([Denzin and Lincoln, 1999](#); [Kincheloe, 2001](#)). Thus, in addressing the complications of power and exploring the ways power shapes knowledge, researchers can embrace ‘loving perception’ and ‘world travelling’, whereby the different worldviews, knowledges and lived experiences of ‘others’ can be understood and explored together ([Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005](#); [Manning, 2018](#); [Ceci Misoczky, 2019](#)). By helping researchers understand the ways the coloniality of power influences the social, cultural, gendered, historical, economic and political conditions under which knowledge is produced, a decolonial feminist ethnography works to dismantle mainstream thinking and practice that, perhaps unknowingly, are implicit in perpetuating ‘otherness’ through the reproduction of systems of class, race and gender oppression, and encourages the questioning of dominant systems and knowledges (Kincheloe et al., 2015; [Manning, 2018](#); [Mignolo, 2007](#); [Ceci Misoczky, 2019](#)).

## **Undertaking a decolonial feminist ethnography in practice and performance**

In theory, a decolonial feminist ethnography is an empowering, ethically engaged methodology that can challenge the coloniality of power to bring forward different worldviews, knowledges and lived experiences. However, in practice, the undertaking of this research approach is complex and challenging. To address the politics of power and positionality when engaging in research with the ‘other’ a decolonial feminist ethnographer must engage in self-reflexivity throughout the research process and explicitly explore power relations and representational practices (who produces and owns knowledge) ([Brewis and Wray-Bliss, 2008](#); [Manning, 2018](#); [Özkazanc-Pan, 2012](#)). In undertaking my research, I had to question how, and if, I can represent the lived experiences of marginalised Maya women and encourage myself to openly confront the issues of power and ethics in my research.

### ***The role of reflexivity***

Integrating decolonial feminist thought into ethnographic practice requires deep engagement with how the self is involved in the ethnographic research process. As such, the first step in the practice of a decolonial feminist ethnography is to engage in reflexive practices. Reflexivity questions our relationship with our social world and the way in which we understand our experiences ([Cunliffe, 2003](#)). Being reflexive encourages us to be honest in the motivations that bring us to our research and also to be honest about our identities, positions, power, assumptions and so on, when engaging in research ([Alvesson et al., 2008](#); [Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013](#); [Hardy et al., 2001](#); [McDonald, 2013](#)). A decolonial feminist ethnography embraces reflexivity, and reflexive practices encourage the questioning of the researchers position as (re)presenter of participants and their knowledge, the examination of power relationships and the recognition of the intersections of voice, place and privilege throughout the research process ([Özkazanc-Pan, 2012](#); [Sultana, 2007](#)).

The many social, economic and cultural differences between myself and the Maya women placed me in an irreconcilable position of difference, and I had to regard myself as the 'other' and reflexively question the situated, socially constructed nature of my self and my research participants ([Foley, 2002](#)). This is particularly important in the context of research with multiple axes of difference, inequalities and geopolitics ([Manning, 2018](#); [Sultana, 2007](#)). There are clear ethnic, social and cultural dichotomies of privileged-poor, educated-unschooled, rural-urban and White-Brown that greatly influenced my relationship with the women participants. I was never going to be able to remove the physical, economic and social differences between the women and me. My identity and knowledge are formed within a European ontology of modernity, and I experience our world as a White woman whose Western culture and epistemology are considered transcendent above all others. The Maya women participants experience our world in a vastly different way. Theirs is one where their gender, culture, experiences and knowledge are regarded as inferior and remain absent from a universalised, Western modernity. As a result, I had to challenge my thinking, embrace our differences and seek out ways to form a commonality to overcome my difference and position of power.

To address this, I wrote ongoing diary-like notes examining myself, including my expectations, assumptions, bias, power and so on, unpacking how my relationship with the women participants was evolving and questioning the ways in which I de-centre myself from the research to ensure the women's voices and knowledge were emerging through the research. Reflexivity is equally important after fieldwork. As researchers we are in control of analysing the data and presenting the findings, and thus in a position of power over the participants. During data analysis, I continually questioned

what I was seeing and why I was seeing it. I wrote notes about themes that were emerging, and alongside this, I wrote further notes about the context in which themes emerged in the field. Providing context to emerging findings helps resist 'othering' by developing narratives that reflect the women's social, cultural and historical location ([Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012](#)).

By engaging and articulating the politics of my power and positionality, I was able to support the production of knowledge that is located in the lived experiences of the marginalised 'other'. Continually exploring and questioning our relationship, embracing differences, contextualising the research and questioning my authority to represent the Maya women participants and their knowledge help to reduce privilege and distance, creating a more symmetrical power relationship between the self and 'other' ([Fine, 1994](#); [Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012](#)). The researcher's level of reflexivity and the choices we make during data collection, analysis and writing help disrupt traditional power imbalances which often dominate the research process. Empowerment in a decolonial ethnography comes from the space created between the researcher and participants where participants are agentic in the research process and the terms of the researcher-participant relationship. In my decolonial feminist ethnography the practice of creating an empowering methodology with more symmetrical power relations between myself and the Maya women participants emerged from my reflective practices through to my ethnographic performances of moving and listening.

### ***The ethnographic performances of moving and listening***

The *doing* of a decolonial feminist ethnography is a messy, non-linear, improvisational methodology. It can be enacted differently within different research contexts. It was only when I entered the field that I was able to understand how I could build relationships with the women participants and create an empowering space. Our relationship was more than a dichotomy of insider-outsider and sameness-difference; it was a space where power was explored and knowledge produced through moving and listening during the preformed ethnography. Preformed ethnographies simultaneously help build relationships and gather data using a range of methods and performances. This bricolage approach embraces a diversity of data collection methods through improvisation in the field ([Madison, 2012](#)). Various forms and combinations of interviews, dialogue, field notes, stories, newspaper articles, historic documents, digital imagery, movement, literary texts and workshops are all brought together and improvised throughout the ethnographic performance ([Denzin, 2003](#); [Madison, 2012, 2018](#)).

While engaging in reflexive practices, the sensory performances of moving and listening emerged as key methods during my decolonial feminist

ethnography. Together with this, my gender became integrated into my ethnographic performance. As a woman, I could participate in their traditional gendered division of labour that occupied a considerable amount of their time, enabling me to build relationships and reduce power distance. I first gained permission from the women to participate in the everydayness of their work and lives, and for three months, I spent from early morning into the evening with the women in their rural homes in their sparsely populated remote communities. During this time, I moved with them. There is fluidity and flexibility in the women's work and home lives. The women's everydayness consisted of cooking, cleaning, weaving, maintaining livestock and agriculture and meeting with each other to discuss matters relating to their weavings and product orders. To de-centre myself and position of power, and to build relationships with the women participants, I was actively engaged in their daily lives. I helped prepare meals; peeled, cleaned and ground corn (their dietary staple eaten with every meal); washed dishes; organised weaving materials and thread; sat with the women as they strapped themselves into their backstrap weave; cared for livestock; and followed them into their agriculture fields to maintain and harvest crops. Differences remained between us, but little actions that may even seem mundane can be significant in building relationships. The women grew comfortable with me in their homes, their lives and their work. I would always be the 'other' in our relationship, but moving with the women and participating in their everydayness not only enabled me to build relationships and gather rich data, it facilitated the decentring of myself from the research process. This is constitutive to a decolonial feminist ethnography as it is the knowledge, experiences and worldviews of the 'other' that emerge from the research. The researcher is the medium through which these new geopolitics of knowledge emerge.

The environment in which the research takes place shapes relationships and can have a profound impact on the dialogue and emerging data ([Evans and Jones, 2011](#); [Kusenbach, 2003](#)). In moving with the Maya women participants, I was able to de-centre myself and create a more informal environment. This shifts the focus for participants; they are not concentrating on providing the 'correct' answer in an interview but engaged in an informal discussion in a relaxed atmosphere. Together we were exposed to the multi-sensory stimulation of the surrounding environment; animals roaming the open family compound, children playing, family members coming and going, all within a high altitude tropical, luscious green landscape with their homes concealed by large swaths of cornfields. Engaging with the women in their home environment offers privileged insight into both place and self in a more intimate setting. This enabled me to enhance my understanding of the women's relationship to their environment within the context of their

gendered identities and social and cultural location. Movement in a performed ethnography helps the researcher to understand the lived experience of the 'other' and provides context to the knowledge being produced, and, in so doing, helps the researcher address the politics of power and positionality.

Moving and talking with the women throughout the day, on their terms and in their homes and communities, enabled the women to go about the everydayness of their work and lives. I was the 'other' trying to understand their world and to do this I had to enter their world on their terms. I adapted to the women's lives and moved fluidly with them through their daily lives, wherever they went I went and whatever they did I did. Much of our relationship building and dialogue emerged during our informal conversations as we prepared food. Mealtime is central to the familial social experience in the Maya women's homes, and it was during this time that the women talked freely; we shared experiences and talked about our lives. Together we created a casual, relaxed environment. I helped prepare food and peel vegetables, and the women laughed at how poorly I made tortillas. These informal interactions and dialogue became ongoing negotiated spaces for the development of symmetrical power relations, as well as reflexive identity construction and our relationship development. The performances of moving and listening became the vehicles through which I engaged in Lugones' (1987) concepts of 'world travelling' and 'loving perception'. Performances enable researchers to travel to the worlds of the 'other' and enter domains of intersubjectivity that problematize how we categorize ourselves and the 'other' and how we see ourselves through the 'others' eyes (Lugones, 1987 [Madison, 2018](#)). 'Loving perception' requires researchers to use space and dialogue to diffuse power and authority when 'world travelling'.

The sensory performance of movement generates richer data by being able to understand the connectedness of the women to their environment and also capture distinctive characteristics of place ([Evans and Jones, 2011](#)), while embodied expressions help to understand experiences ([Conquergood, 2002](#)). Moreover, it decentres the authority of the researcher and situates knowledge production in a particular time and place. [Conquergood \(2002\)](#) argues that the sensory practice of bodily movement is a democratic, ethical endeavour. It contrasts the mediations of distance and detachment to an embodied mode of aliveness in interactive engagement and togetherness with the 'other' on intersubjective ground.

Through reflexivity, movement and dialogue, I was able to build collaborative relationships and strive for the empowerment of the Maya women participants in the research process. [Madison \(2012, 186\)](#) explains that it is through dialogue and listening that researchers resist the process of 'othering', as dialogue embraces 'diversity, difference, and pluralism'. Citing [Conquergood \(1985\)](#), [Madison \(2012\)](#) draws out the relationship between

reflexivity and listening; listening invites dialogue and dialogue encourages reflection on relationships and the tensions between the self and 'other' in the research process. The result of this brings many different voices into the research without anyone silencing the other. Having a dialogue with participants moves them into the research process (as opposed to being objects of the research) as they are involved and engaged in the production of knowledge. Traditional ethnographies can produce imperialist tendencies in representing participants and their knowledge and thereby collude with the structures of domination ([Fine, 1994](#); [Said, 1993](#); Tuhiwai Smith, 1999. A dialogue with participants is vital to decolonial ethnography as power relations are embedded in ethnography. Dialogic performance helps the researcher address politics/power relations and representational practices and facilitates the mutual creation of knowledge. It is part of 'world travelling', whereby through dialogue the researcher and participant engage in the co-performance of knowledge production. Dialogic performance becomes the space for the 'other' to engage equally in the research process and the researcher to become ethically invested in collaborative representation (Madison, 2006).

Through dialogue the Maya women participants become partners and agents in the research process. Together we explored different areas of their work and lives to work out meaning together. In the practice of my decolonial feminist ethnography, this involved transcribing and reviewing of all interviews, conversations, field notes, observations, photographs and various documents at the end of each day. This enabled me to develop a preliminary understanding of the women's lives and work. With this, the following day I discussed the development of my understanding with the women to gauge their opinion and perspective. In so doing, provisional ideas and findings were worked out together. This became an iterative, ongoing process throughout my research. The women were agentic in the research process, thereby ensuring that I was not re-imposing dominant structures that have oppressed them but acknowledging their agency in the telling of their story.

The performance of listening in a decolonial feminist ethnography goes beyond the sense of simply hearing. Listening is a multi-layered, multi-sensory engagement, whereby relationships are built through connectedness and collaboration, instilling an ethics of co-creation in the research process ([Madison, 2018](#); [Fischlin et al., 2013](#)). As explained by [Madison \(2012\)](#), listening goes beyond participants being heard and included, but focuses on voice. Voice is the embodied self of the participants constructed by their social, cultural and historical experiences. Voice, in a decolonial feminist ethnography, recognises subjectivity. Thus, through listening to participants, their personal experiences, knowledge, struggles, resilience, cultural politics etc., are engaged with and explored. The researcher, symbolically and

temporarily, enters into participants' locations of voice within their own experiences ([Madison, 2012](#)). Participants' voices, perspectives and narratives emerge from listening, and driven by an ethical responsibility to their participants, researchers communicate their worlds in their own words. Although the researcher is writing and representing the participants' narratives, the narratives reflect their socially situated lived experiences. In the context of my research, I had to acknowledge that I write from a position of power and privilege, but at the same time, the voices of the Maya women are located with mine in the telling of their story. My decolonial feminist ethnography was localised and grounded in the Maya women's meaning of themselves and their work, and through reflection, listening and moving, we explored their work and lives together. A decolonial feminist ethnography enables the voice of research participants to be heard. However, this voice is not a romanticised representation of the 'other' nor a perpetuation of their 'otherness', but a representation of their lived experiences grounded in their subjectivities.

A decolonial feminist ethnography is a bricolage approach to critical research that embraces the improvisations of sensory preformed ethnography. Together with this, the power and politics of a decolonial feminist ethnography demand ethical responsibility on behalf of the researcher. The coloniality of power has marginalised the voice, knowledge and subjectivities of the 'other'. As put by [Conquergood \(2002, 146\)](#), 'what gets squeezed out by this epistemic violence is the whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, co-experienced'. To strive for the empowerment of research participants, a decolonial feminist ethnography is built on an ethical commitment to respect the voice and knowledge of the 'other' and recognises the politics of power and positionality embedded in the research process. The sensory performances of moving and listening facilitate this by embracing the co-production and co-ownership of knowledge and bring forward different worldviews, knowledges and lived experiences. Removing the abstract and authoritative study of/about subjects, sensory performances provide an opportunity for 'another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection' with the 'other' ([Conquergood, 2002, 146](#)). Integrating moving and listening into my decolonial feminist ethnography helped me build relationships and address power differentials between myself and the Maya women participants by paying attention to the issues of voice, interactions and dialogue to ensure that they were agentic in the production of knowledge about them.

## **Conclusion**



This ethnographic approach is just one of many empowering methodologies that create space for more engaged social and organisational research practice (e.g., [Bell and Willmott, 2020](#); [Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013](#); [Cunliffe and Scaratti, 2017](#); [Reedy and King, 2019](#); [Madison, 2018](#); [Özkazanc-Pan, 2012](#), among others). This chapter, and the many empowering methodologies challenging traditional research practices, has argued that it is vital to create space for more situated approaches to producing knowledge in management research that are grounded in ethics and epistemology, as opposed to Western ‘scientific rigour’, whereby a Western ontology of modernity dominates academic agendas and neo-colonial relations shape the practice of knowledge production (see [Bell et al. 2017](#)). Empowering methodologies foster greater pluralism and innovative approaches to knowledge production, which can help to pave the way towards the eradication of core-periphery relations in academic knowledge production and dissemination. This is a movement grounded in researcher responsibility and participant agency. It emphasises the need for researchers to take responsibility on how knowledge is produced and the impact of our knowledge claims. This chapter makes a contribution to this movement by providing insight into an alternative empowering approach to research. I have demonstrated how a decolonial feminist ethnography can disrupt the politics of power and positionality and explored why this is important. Specifically, this chapter contributes insight into: (1) the theoretical development of a decolonial feminist ethnography, and (2) how this research can be performed in practice to produce knowledge *with* the ‘other’.

Engaging in reflexivity and addressing the power and politics in knowledge production it become possible to challenge the coloniality of power and integrate the voices, lived experiences and worldviews of ‘others’ into mainstream management and organisation studies, and thereby produce different forms of knowledge/ways of knowing and create a new geopolitics of knowledge. Empowering methodologies have the ability to promote social transformation. By challenging inequalities that are embedded in the research process, particularly with those who are ‘othered’, an empowering methodology ensures participants are agents in the production of knowledge about them ([Davis, 2008](#); [Ross, 2017](#)). A decolonial feminist ethnography is an empowering methodology that acknowledges the researcher’s responsibility to research participants, particularly the ‘other’, and addresses this in practice by means of ongoing reflexivity to ensure participants are agentic in research. This approach to research thereby focuses on the importance of ethics and epistemology in shaping the processes of knowledge production.

‘Loving perception’, dialogic performance and ethics are among the many concepts and practices integrated into my decolonial feminist ethnography, yet they all require researchers to understand that all individuals, including their

knowledge, worldview and lived experiences, are valuable and deserving of understanding. This in turn leads to a more understanding society where differences and 'otherness' are accepted, while also offering a 'more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in a critical, reflexive relation to our own and others' practices' ([Haraway, 1988](#), 579).

In undertaking a decolonial feminist ethnographic performance, researchers can come to understand the worldviews and the lived experiences of the 'other'. This is an act of integrating ethics, epistemology and empowerment. Decolonial feminist theory critiques Western representation of the 'other' and reveals how knowledge produced in and by the West is layered with colonial power, thereby creating and sustaining a politics of Western knowledge dominance and rendering the 'other' an object of knowledge (Mignolo, 2007 [Prasad, 2003](#); [Said, 1978](#)). Applying this theoretical lens to critical ethnography enables a researcher to understand knowledge as situated. That is, knowledge is embedded within a social, cultural, historical and political time and place that reflects contextual features and lived experiences ([Haraway, 1988](#)). A decolonial feminist ethnography values all knowledge and lived experiences as equal, and in so doing provides a new framework within the geopolitics of knowledge production, one that demands respect for the pluralization of differences.

## Note

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■ The 'Global South' is a highly politically contested and debated discourse. It refers to the geographic, socio-economic and political divide that exists between the countries of the economically 'developed world', known as the Global North or the West, and the countries that are referred to as 'Third World' or 'developing nations', primarily former colonies of the Global North that are seen as poor (Prashad, 2012). I use the term 'Global South' throughout this chapter to refer to the countries that are victims of, firstly, colonisation and, subsequently, capitalist mal-development, and, as such, they are considered economically developing or underdeveloped.