



What is coloniality and how does it affect global health research?

Pathways to epistemic justice in global health research

Caesar A. Atuire
Ethics Lead, MSc IHTM

Defining Global Health (Salm et al., 2021)

In its broadest sense, GH can be defined as an area of research and practice committed to the application of overtly multidisciplinary, multisectoral and culturally sensitive approaches for reducing health disparities that transcend national borders.

Four key themes that emerge from the analysis are that GH is:

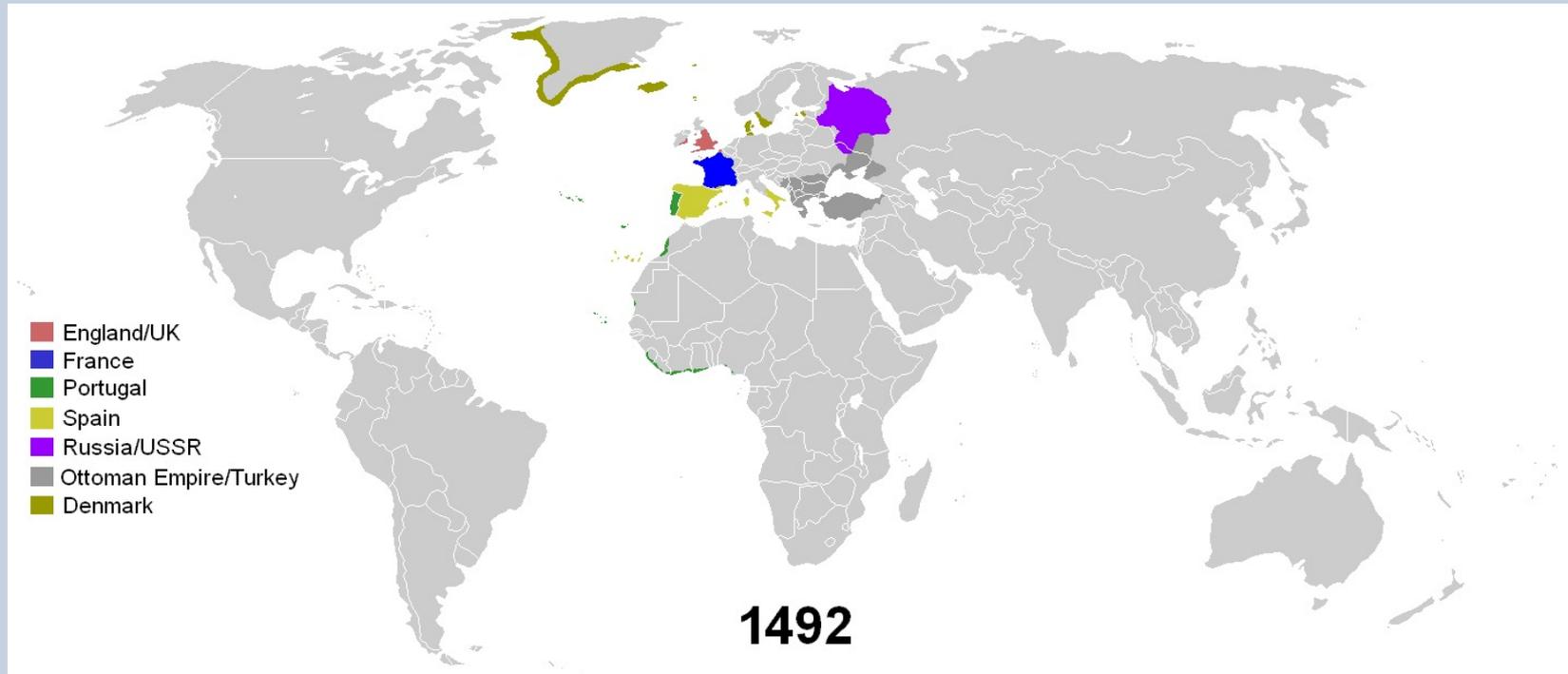
- (1) a multiplex approach to worldwide health improvement taught and researched through academic institutions;
- (2) an ethos that is guided by justice principles;
- (3) a mode of governance that yields influence through political decision-making, problem identification, and the allocation and exchange of resources across borders;
- (4) a polysemous concept with historical antecedents and an emergent future.

Future discussions on the topic might shift from questioning the abstract ‘what’ of GH to more pragmatic and reflexive questions about ‘who’ defines GH and towards what ends.

Health Research (UKRI-MRC)

- Fundamental discovery science which aims to develop the necessary knowledge base and improve understanding of biological or other factors influencing human health
- Population-based studies which follow the health of a large number of people, or a 'cohort', over a period of time usually for a number of years
- Interventional studies, where people may be randomised to different interventions, such as those which aim to prove the safety and or efficacy of a 'product' like a Clinical Trial of an Investigational Medicinal Product (CTIMP).

A world shaped by colonialism: a lens



Colonialism/Coloniality: conceptual unpacking

- Colonization to colonialism
 - Colonialism is a relationship of domination between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and of their ordained mandate to rule. (Osterhammel 1997: 16f)
- Neo-colonialism, post-colonial, and postcolonial
- Decolonization
- Coloniality and decoloniality

Ethical Appraisal of colonization

- Colonialism subtracts the self-determining agency of communities and peoples.
- Colonialism replaces the agency of communities and individuals with an agenda that serves the interests of the colonizers.
- Engenders:
 - Epistemicide
 - Ecocide
 - Genocide
- Coloniality as a *modus operandi* of perpetuates the injustices of colonialism even in the absence of evident colonizers.

Decolonization: Global Health Research priority setting

- There will always be more research needs than the resources available. Hence, the need to set priorities.
- A decolonial approach would require taking a closer look at the process and substance of global health priority setting.
- This would require a conversation around:
 - Who is involved/engaged in priority setting?
 - What makes a health issue a research priority?
 - Who benefits from health research?

Decolonization: Epistemic Justice

- Since research health research is about improving our knowledge base and understanding of biological or other factors influencing human health, ethical research, to be free from coloniality, requires a commitment effort of epistemic justice.
- Pratt & De Vries (2023) framework:
- **Knowledge-producer layer: Who is producing scientific knowledge?**
 - ‘Supremacy is there, glaringly, in how global health organisations operate, who runs them, where they are located, who holds the purse strings, who sets the agenda’ (Abimbola and Pai, p1627)
- **Knowledge-applied layer: What do we consider as knowledge?**
 - what epistemologies, theories, principles, values, concepts and methods are taught and used to in global health research.
 - Universality versus pluriversality
- **Knowledge-solicited layer: Whose voices count?**
 - whose voices are solicited, recorded and used in empirical ethics research and in international ethics guideline development
 - Transactional versus transformational inclusion

Some useful readings

Salm, M., Ali, M., Minihane, M., & Conrad, P. (2021). Defining global health: findings from a systematic review and thematic analysis of the literature. *BMJ Global Health*, 6(6), e005292.

Abimbola, S., & Pai, M. (2020). [Will global health survive its decolonisation?](#) *Lancet* (London, England), 396(10263), 1627-1628. PMID: 33220735.

Pratt, B., & de Vries, J. (2023). Where is knowledge from the global South? An account of epistemic justice for a global bioethics. *Journal of Medical Ethics*.

Atuire, C. A. (2022). Black Lives Matter and the removal of racist statues-Perspectives of an African. *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual-Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur*, 3(2).

Devakumar, D., Selvarajah, S., Shannon, G., Muraya, K., Lasoye, S., Corona, S., Paradies, Y., Abubakar, I., & Achiume, E. T. (2020). [Racism, the public health crisis we can no longer ignore](#). *Lancet* (London, England), 395(10242), e112–e113.

Khan, T., Abimbola, S., Kyobutungi, C., & Pai, M. (2022). How we classify countries and people—and why it matters. *BMJ Global Health*, 7(6), e009704.

Atuire, C. A. & Bull, S. (2022). COVID-19 heightens the imperative to decolonize global health research. *Global Justice: Theory Practice Rhetoric*. (In print, ISSN: 1813853-56-8648242).

Atuire, C.A., and Rutazibwa, O. U. (2021). An African Reading of the Covid-19 pandemic and the stakes of decolonization. In U. K. Karunakara, P. Chatterjee, & A. Miller (Eds.), [Human and Social Costs of Covid Response](#). Global Health Justice Partnership: Yale University, New Haven.

Some Classics

- Fanon, F. (1970). *Black skin, white masks*. London: Paladin.
- Memmi, A. (2013). *The colonizer and the colonized*. Routledge.
- Nkrumah, K. (1965). Neo-Colonialism: the Highest Stage of Imperialism: “The Mechanics of Neo-Colonialism”.
- Rodney, W. (2018). *How europe underdeveloped africa*. Verso Books.
- Freire, P. (2020). Pedagogy of the oppressed. In *Toward a Sociology of Education* (pp. 374-386). Routledge.

THANK YOU!