

🗨️ Research  
Colonialism:  
Working within  
Complex Systems

Elizabeth S. Rose, MPH, MEd  
Vanderbilt Global Health Symposium  
April 13, 2020



Image source: <https://www.cdcpress.com/One-World-Health-An-Overview-of-Global-Health/Crisp/p/book/9781498739412>

# Research Colonialism

aka: Scientific colonialism, Scientific imperialism, Safari research, and Missionary research

What is it?

Indirect control or exploitation by countries in the Northern hemisphere over those in the Southern hemisphere

Jentsch & Pilley, 2003

*"Africa south of the Sahara is the scientific backyard of West Europe... the intellectual domination of the West is growing rather than diminishing"*

Nagtegaal & DeBruin, 1994

1.3%

of biomedical publications  
in high impact journals  
authored are by sub-  
Sahara African researchers

Uthman, et al, 2015

30%

of sub-Saharan African  
research publications  
include an in-country  
co-author

Dahdouh-Guebas et al., 2003

62%

of publications with a LMIC  
author had authors from  
multiple countries

...Collaboration is great but only 3% of  
those were south-south partnerships,  
the rest included a northern co-author

Fonseca e Fonseca et al., 2018

## 🗨 Publications by “southern” authors

Bibliometric analyses of peer-reviewed journal articles

Dean et al., 2017; Defor et al., 2017; Morel et al., 2017; Mlotshwa et al., 2017

# Impacts of Research Colonialism

Misaligned priorities



Lack of acknowledgement & inclusion



Exploitation & lack of benefits



Sustainability & dependency





Collaboration can be a fruitful exchange of ideas, but when a low-resourced country partners almost exclusively with high-income countries, collaboration may turn into dependence or even subordination

Roy, 2018



## Dependency Theory

- Unequal relationship between the core and periphery
- Core has funding, equipment, and skilled human resources
- Collaboration benefits the core because they have tools to disseminate information
- Periphery benefits because they can partner with scientific knowledge at the core
- Periphery becomes increasingly dependent on the core to improve their scientific position

## Interdependency Theory

- Positive growth among all partners

## Institutionalism

- Science practiced at the core is viewed to be the correct model
- Educational and collegial ties perpetuate the rule-like status of the core's methods, practices, and views



## Consider...

- In what ways do your experiences support or refute the data?
  - How has research colonialism, dependency, and/or interdependency surfaced in your partnerships?
- Are all voices are included in your partnerships? How do you know?
- What steps can you take at the beginning of a partnership to encourage equitable collaboration?



Good beginnings make  
good endings. –Ghanaian Proverb

Elizabeth Rose | [elizabeth.rose@vumc.org](mailto:elizabeth.rose@vumc.org)