# UnConference 2020 Guided podcast reflection on decolonisation physiotherapy education

## Document details

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This document is currently open for comment from parties with an interest in the topic or involvement with the Unconference. Please contact [shaun.cleaver@mcgill.ca](mailto:shaun.cleaver@mcgill.ca) for communications beyond comments to the document.

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Progressing in sections, the podcast guides listeners through reflections on:

1. Who are my people? What is our relationship to the place that we call home?
2. Whose stories are heard?
3. Things that are skin … deep
4. It is in our heads
5. Structure precedes function
6. Are we sure that physiotherapy “fits” everywhere? A question derived from professional experience in Haiti
7. What would decolonising physiotherapy education look like?

## Shownotes

“Colonisation” and “imperialism” - these are not words that are commonly heard within physiotherapy education programmes. And yet, these forces are major factors that shape possibilities for individuals and peoples in the modern era. Because of the embedded and pervasive nature of colonisation and imperialism, it can be difficult to identify these phenomena, let alone confront them. Colonisation and imperialism are premised upon violence and domination, producing devastating effects on human health and well-being.

This episode will take listeners through a series of issues related to two main points:

* the conscientisation of listeners to the realities of colonisation and imperialism, and
* the location of the self in these dynamics.

The episode relies primarily on narrative, with intentional emphasis on personal perspectives of societal and structural phenomena. Increasingly, through the podcast sections, the content threads connections to the physiotherapy profession in general and physiotherapy education specifically.

References are identified for individual podcast sections the following three references are a complementary sub-set the comprehensive reference list:

Piggot, J. (2017) *Introducing Myself* <https://medium.com/@judipiggott/introducing-myself-dddae1eb04a6>

Hojjati A, Beavis ASW, Kassam A, Choudhury D, Fraser M, Masching R,. Nixon SA. (2018) Educational content related to postcolonialism and indigenous health inequities recommended for all rehabilitation students in Canada: a qualitative study, Disability and Rehabilitation, 40:26, 3206-3216, DOI:10.1080/09638288.2017.1381185

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, education & society*, 1(1). <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630>

## 

## Podcast transcript (preceded by intended messages; followed by references)

### Introduction

Hi, I’m Shaun Cleaver. Welcome to the Decolonising podcast.

This podcast is part of the guided reflection podcast stream of the 2020 In Beta Unconference. This activity includes three components

1. Listen to a podcast
2. Record your key reflections and share these with other participants
3. Join a discussion with other unconference participants on the topic and the reflections that it has stimulated

This podcast is around [**60**] minutes long. The podcast is an exploratory work that addresses content that is typically invisible in physiotherapy curriculum. It is possible that some listeners with a particularly close relationship to colonisation find the material difficult to process. Should this happen and you feel the need to stop listening, we encourage you to acknowledge those feelings, take note of the triggers, and engage in healthy, restorative self-care.

The podcast includes multiple reflection points to make you think about issues related to colonisation - and space to reflect on your responses. We suggest that you listen to the podcast away from your desk. You might choose to listen whilst you go for a walk or a run in your local area, or you could find somewhere to sit and listen quietly away from other screens and distractions.

At the end of the podcast you will be prompted to capture your key reflections in a way that they can be shared with other participants. You can choose to do this however and wherever you wish. It could be as a video, in writing, a series of pictures and could be saved as a note on your phone, a Google doc, a blog, a series of tweets, or a video on YouTube.

You may want to make brief notes on your thoughts as you go, (you might wish to pause the podcast and your walk to note things down), but you don’t have to record and share your response to every question. Instead, aim to capture the key reflection that you took away from the experience.

Once you have created your brief reflection on the podcast, please share it by posting it, or a link to it on the Decolonising Padlet on the Unconference Canvas page by [**Insert deadline**] UTC on September 15th.

After sharing your reflection, take a look at the reflections from other participants to gain different perspectives on the topic. These will form the stimulus for the synchronous discussion on 15th September at [**2:30pm**]. To join the conversation click the link on the Decolonising Canvas page at the relevant time.

### Section 1 - Who are my people? What is our relationship to the place that we call home?

#### Main message

We are all involved in the dynamics of colonialism and imperialism; we begin our process by locating ourselves within it

*Sub-message*: Although colonisation is pervasive, it is often unseen

#### Text

*Bonjour! C’est le début de septembre de l’année 2020 et je vous parle de Tiohtá:ke, là où les bateaux et les rivières se rencontrent, dans la langue du peuple Kanien'kehá:ka.*

Now in English.

I know that what I just said is likely not understood by most of the people who listen to this podcast, even for those who do understand the language that I used.

One, many listeners outside Canada are likely to struggle with my accent given that it is non-dominant which is very different from the accents of larger French-speaking countries. Two, the name of the stewards of this land and they name they gave it have been largely subjugated. If instead, I said that I was recording in Montréal, using the name given by the Québécois name rather than the one given by the Kanien'kehá:ka, the number of people who know where I am would rise sharply. It would rise further still if I used the English pronunciation - Montreal.

Although you might not have understood the words, there are certain aspects of the opening few lines that I intend to infuse throughout the remainder of this podcast.

This is a podcast about peoples, resources and doing things differently. Please allow me to explain how I see those points exemplified through my opening lines, starting with doing things differently.

I began this podcast in Québécois, or what some might call Canadian French, fully knowing that English was the expected language. Did anyone tell me that I had to do this in English? Never. It was taken for granted. Before you hit play, how much time did you spend thinking about what language this podcast might be in?

If you thought that this content might be, could be, or should be delivered in another language, I really want to hear from you because we need to talk! Nous devons vraiment parler de cela! Tenemos que hablar de ese sujeto importante.

For the rest of us, I want to draw attention to how strange it is that we take for granted the global dominance of one language, understood by a minority of humans, while there are a few thousand living languages around the world. As part of doing things differently I invite you to pay attention to this way that we take this language domination for granted. In doing things differently, I invite you to be open to perceiving things that you do not normally perceive.

In addition to doing things differently, I claimed that this podcast would be about peoples. For this we can talk about identity, especially collective identity and how we relate to it as individuals. But behind this, there is more: beyond identity, when we refer to peoples we are talking about ways of doing, ways of knowing, and collective solidarity, or community.

Of course, language fits into this too. I drew your attention to language because it is a lively and contentious topic here in Montréal-Tiohtá:ke-Montreal - but also because of its importance to my identity. Through this podcast, I will draw upon my own first-person accounts of peoples and identities. I draw upon the first-person account because I can deliver these truthfully and faithfully. At the same time, I acknowledge and own some problems with this strategy: the first-person accounts center my story and the places that I know. Indeed, part of the problem that this podcast strives to address is exactly that: the centering of the perspectives - and the interests - of people who are positioned similarly to me. On this note, it seems like now is a good opportunity for me to remind listeners that this podcast is merely an introduction to the topic of decolonisation. In order to explore a limited number of foundational topics to audiences that might be approaching these for the first time, some important aspects are glossed over or even excluded. For listeners noticing these deficiencies, I hope that we can collaborate moving forward. For all others, I ask that you recognize that these first-person accounts are by-definition limited, while simultaneously recognizing how these can effectively draw attention to important issues.

Onto our third item on our list of three: resources. As I talk about resources, I will frequently draw attention to the especially important issue of land. Admittedly, there is a valid argument that we should not subsume land into the category of resources, lest it lead us to think about land as a commodity - that is to say, a resource that is rendered generic to make it easier to buy and sell. Although this is a drawback to keep seriously, in later sections of the podcast I will identify how resource acquisition - land plus some other things - has driven colonisation.

So for our list of three areas of focus, we have doing things differently, peoples, and resources, particularly land.

As mentioned earlier, much of this podcast's content is drawn from my own first-person accounts. One way for us to move beyond this is for you to bring your first-person accounts, to bring yourself, into this reflection. Since you are listening to this podcast, the odds are that you - like me - have some involvement with the education of physiotherapy students. Typically, in this professional context, when we talk about bringing ourselves, we are talking about ourselves as professionals, as physiotherapy educators. For the purpose of this reflective experience, I am going to propose that you do something different - that you instead focus upon who you are beyond your professional role. Since we are talking about peoples and land, I especially want you to home in on those aspects, and ask yourself who your people are? The land that you call home - I will let you choose what this is, maybe it is where you live and/or where you work, maybe it is where you are from - what is your relationship to this land that you call home?

Having asked myself these questions for years now, I can go first, to provide you an example, just in case you need that.

My name is Shaun and I live and work in a city people call Montreal. The lands and waters here have long been stewarded by the Kanien'kehá:ka people, long before this place was forcibly controlled, by people from Europe. People like my ancestors who came to this continent from France and England. Descendants of these Europeans, I am a settler on this land. In fact, I grew up elsewhere in the Canadian nation-state and yet it was easy for me to re-settle in unceded Kanien'kehá:ka territory, without ever having to ask the permission of that people.

Now it is your turn. This section ends with the reflective questions: who are your people? What is your relationship to the place that you call home?

#### Reflection

Who are your people? What is your relationship to the land, in the place that you call home?

Resources and notes

Piggot, J. (2017) *Introducing Myself* <https://medium.com/@judipiggott/introducing-myself-dddae1eb04a6>

This blog post is a thoughtful and gentle account of a Canadian woman learning to recognise her identity as a settler in “her native land.” This post helps to explain the logic behind the declaration of people and land that Shaun provided. This logic is designed primarily for “settler-colonist states” like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. The definitional feature of settler-colonist states is that peoples (typically Europeans) came from elsewhere to dominate Indigenous peoples and control the land. In the settler-colonist states above, the settlers also outpopulated the Indigenous people and fabricated a new narrative about the rightful ownership of the land.

There are relatively minor, yet still relevant distinctions, between settler-colonist states. Meanwhile, there is much greater diversity in the relationship between peoples and land in nation-states with very different histories. Nonetheless, European expansion, colonisation, and empire has impacted all peoples and places. While the example that Shaun provided might not translate neatly to everyone everywhere, participants are still encouraged to reflect deeply about people and place. Optimally, this reflection will help participants identify the ways that colonisation has influenced this relationship.

### Section 2 - Whose stories are heard?

#### Main message

Power relations influence what we take to be truth

*Sub-message*: Imperialism is a tremendous wielding of power

#### Text

Since I spoke about identify and place in section one, you learned that my current home is Montreal with me arriving here from elsewhere in Canada, and my family arriving in Canada from Europe. I also made a big deal about language and foreshadowed that this was important to my identity. Here, in section 2, I will explain why.

As many of you may know Montreal is in Quebec, the part of Canada that is predominantly French. The place I come from is predominantly English and because of this English is my first language, or as we say in Canada, it is my mother tongue. I learned how to speak French as a young adult, eventually becoming sufficiently fluent to use this language professionally. Despite this accomplishment, I have a second language speaker accent and a name that draws unwanted attention. Cleaver is inherited from my father's English roots and Shaun is a misspelled Irish name that is decidedly not Quebecois. People often suspect that I'm not really from here. And they're mostly right.

All this is very relevant to my current daily life - but the reason that it matters to my identity, and relates to decolonisation, is a longer story.

English is my mother tongue but it's not my mother's mother tongue. She grew up speaking French in an exceptional situation: she was raised in a small French-Canadian enclave in an area of western Canada that is otherwise very English speaking. Her parents and grandparents moved there from Quebec. When she became an adult my mom re-settled once again, moving to the Toronto area where she met my father

When my mother left the place where she grew up, the family told her that she would lose her roots. I think it is for that reason that my mother cared so much for me to learn her family's story. I learned of the hardscrabble poverty on my grandparents' farm in Alberta where nothing was easy. My mom emphasized how people managed to carry on only because of a big hard-working family and a tightly knit community. I learned of the way that the government interfered with this community, forcing my mother and her siblings to speak English at school, since before Canada became a bilingual country in 1969, English language assimilation was the official education policy in most of the country. The cumulative effects of official policy and then moving to an English-dominant area have made it difficult for my mom to speak her mother tongue. My mother's family story is one of pride overlaid with injustice.

Meanwhile, my father did not raise me with the same sense of a family story. He was knowledgeable in history and has a good memory, but when asked about his identity, he is more inclined to describe himself as a regular or normal Canadian.

In some ways, my family story is a micro version of a macro story of Canada: English and French found themselves together, the English dominated and don't spend much time thinking about how things are. Meanwhile, the French know that they are being dominated and therefore pay closer attention to their identity and culture.

You may or may not find this story interesting. Personally, I do, which is why I had to edit the story multiple times, cutting detail to the minimal amount that I thought would still make sense. But I propose to you that the interesting part of the story is neither the parts that I told you not the ones that I cut out, it is the parts that were de-emphasized or never told to me.

Whereas it is true that my mom's family worked incredibly hard as rural farmers, the story that was told to me overlooks another important truth: that land that they were farming was made available to them at low or no cost because it was taken from someone else. My ancestors benefitted from this arrangement twice, first in Quebec and then in Alberta. In other words, a foundational aspect of my family's wealth is a result of stolen land.

My mom ensured that I knew that the government tried, and mostly succeeded, to take her language away; meanwhile, she never spoke about how that same government took away land from Indigenous people. And a young me was never told that at the same time that my mom was being forced into English, the Canadian government was deploying education in far more violent ways: through a residential school system that not only imposed language assimilation but also ripped children away from their families and communities. On purpose. During that era, settler-colonist Canada believed that they were helping Indigenous children enter the modern world by severing their ties to not only their language, but also their families, land, culture, and traditional knowledge.

So what of my families' stories? When aware of the larger history, are my families' stories a problem? Well...no...and yes.

My mother's story of loss and assimilation is a very important part of how I see myself. Although being raised in English to believe that I was French created an identity that confuses others, I feel that I have been able to respond constructively to this identity. Also, through my own journey of language and identity reclamation, I have earned tremendous respect for Indigenous peoples who are resuscitating their cultures, cultures that my ancestors tried to kill. When deployed in this manner, as an example from which we can draw principles and use these to inspire solidarity with peoples who have suffered far more violence, then these stories can be a force for good. But a precursor of this solidarity is an awareness of the stories of other peoples - and it is in this way that our stories might be a problem.

Despite its positives, one accurate assessment of my mother's family history is that its self-centeredness allowed an ignorance towards greater injustice. I propose that this assessment is even charitable: I think that it is possible that one main purpose of my mother's family story is precisely to obscure the ways that our small comforts were made possible by state sanctioned theft and genocide. Whatever your reactions to these stories are, the key message here is the need to actively look for the stories that are not being told - especially those stories that are being hidden for the purpose of erasing the record of colonial violence*.*

#### Reflection

What are the stories of your people and the place that you call home? Are there other people who call this place home too? What of the stories of these other people? Is there a relationship between your stories and the other stories?

Resources and notes

McLean, S. (2018) “*We Built A Life From Nothing”: White Settler Colonialism And The Myth Of Meritocracy*. https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2017/12/McLean.pdf

### Section 3 – Things that are skin … deep

#### Main message

Historical events shape contemporary realities

*Sub-message*: Racism is a historically embedded social construct; racism has been profoundly influenced by colonisation and imperialism

#### Text

Through sections 1 and 2, the substantive content that I have brought to this podcast has focused on issues in Canada. I do this because Canada is the nation-state which I know best. Moreover, Canada’s story with respect to colonialism is an exemplary account of at least one phenomenon: that of settler colonialism, where Indigenous peoples are violently subjugated, and eventually outnumbered, by colonising settlers.

I think that it is important for us to learn about settler colonialism - especially since the settler majorities in countries like Canada are just now, slowly, waking up to the violence that they inflict upon Indigenous peoples. Nonetheless, while Canada’s stories are exemplary in some ways, the stories of other places could be more useful to help us understand different phenomena. To expand our consideration somewhat, I will talk about colonialism in a different place – *M-ap pale sou Ayiti, yon kote mwen te gen tan pou mwen konnen anpil*. I will talk about a place that I have come to know well: the small country in the Caribbean that I call “Hay-dee” with my North American English pronunciation. In other parts of the world, the country’s name is often pronounced something like “high-EE-ti.”

Haiti provides us with a useful complement to the story of Canada. Like Canada today, Haiti was once a territory \*dominated\* by settlers of European origin. Unlike Canada, the European settler domination did not occur by outnumbering others.

First, a disclaimer about positionality in this historical account. I am not Haitian by birth nor background but this is a country in which I have worked for an extended period. During that time, I devoted significant effort to learning about the country’s history. Thus far, it seems that my understanding of the distant history of Haiti is reflective of a consensus. Nonetheless I welcome scrutiny and correction from Haitian friends and colleagues.

Haiti is the place where the European invasion of the Americas began - it was off the north west coast of Haiti that Columbus landed in in 1492, thinking, at the time, that he was in India. While the arrival of Europeans in the Americans generally meant subjugation, dispossession and death for Indigenous peoples, this process was particularly swift for the Taino people who lived in what is now Haiti. Within a period of approximately 30 years, the Taino of this area had essentially succumbed to genocide. To the Spanish Empire the destruction of this Indigenous people was not so much an ethical or cultural problem but a practical one: if there were no Indigenous people, there were no Indigenous slaves to work in Spanish mines. The innovation to this supposed problem was to purchase slaves in Africa and transport this so-conceived human commodity to the Americas.

By 1700, control of the area now known as Haiti had transferred from the Spanish kingdom to the French, and the economic focus of Europeans in the Americas had evolved beyond minerals to products like sugar and cotton - goods that could be produced on labour-intensive plantations. The French colony in current Haiti was the example *par excellence* of this arrangement and by the late 1700s it is estimated that slaves of African descent outnumbered white settlers by a ratio of at least ten to one.

This seems like a good time to pause the historical narrative about Haiti and turn our attention to certain principles.

The first principle is to nuance the settler-Indigenous binary that permeated through sections one and two. The presentation of this binary can be useful in that it draws attention to the ways that European people migrated with at least some choice and agency according to the interests of European powers to the detriment and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. While drawing attention to the violence of European invasion is useful, the binary framing hides from view the violent capture and subjugation African slaves, people who were re-conceived to be property and transported against their will with horrific death tolls throughout the process.

The second principle of interest is with respect to race. Many of us have been raised with the understanding that racial categories simply exist and that these categories are processed to produce racism. This understanding is generally inaccurate on multiple accounts.

First of all, it is patently false that racial categories are natural. Instead, these categories are socially constructed. As a quick example of the social construction of race, let us consider former US president Barack Obama. President Obama is accurately identified as the first Black US president according to the racial categories of that country. And yet, Barack Obama’s mother is classified as white. So why is it that President Obama is seen to be a Black man with a white mother and not a white man with a Black father? Indeed, those familiar with the racial categories of South Africa and Haiti know that if Barack Obama had grown up in one of these places, we would not have been seen as Black.

The second falsehood related to the way that I was conditioned to understand race is what we might call a chicken-and-egg dilemma, in other words, which one came first? I was conditioned to understand that that race preceded racism, yet this order of operations is not supported by the historical record. Instead, it seems that the need to categorise humans, in order to justify the theft of land and the theft of bodies, it seems that this racist need to categorise stimulated the creation and the eventual entrenchment of the racial categories themselves.

On this point, I will add another pause to my pause to link this material to salient contemporary affairs. I imagine that all listeners of this podcast will be familiar with the term and the movement #BlackLivesMatter that has attracted renewed attention since George Floyd, a Black man in the US, was murdered by police. Through the subsequent protests and increasing awareness, you might have heard the term BIPOC, meaning “Black, Indigenous, Person of Colour,” a collective term to identify those peoples who are most harmed by racism, at very least in North America. I invite you to note how this term relates to European colonialism, with its foundational, conceptual supremacy of white Europeans and its violent dispossession and specific categorisation of others.

#### Reflection

What are the racial categorisations in the place that you call home? How do you understand the history of those classifications? How do you understand the implication of that classification system?

Resources and notes

James L, Abudiab S, Omar S. (2019) Racialization and Racism: Uncovering the Implicit in Rehabilitation Sciences and Research. *rehabINK*. 1(7). https://rehabinkmag.com/previous-issues/rehabink-summer-2019-volume-1-issue-7/racialization-and-racism-uncovering-the-implicit-in-rehabilitation-sciences-and-research/

### Section 4 - It is in our heads

#### Main message

The main ways of thinking to support biomedicine emerged in tandem with colonisation

*Sub-message*: Physiotherapy’s roots are primarily in biomedicine

#### Text

At its outset, I pledged that this would be a podcast about doing things differently.

Indeed it is a commitment to this pledge that the first three sections were driven by narrative and almost without standard academic material, like definitions or references.

In this section, I talk about the relationship of colonisation to knowledge. In attempting to make space for alternatives to colonising knowledge, I will simultaneously deploy some conventions of the so-called Western academy. Don’t worry, I recognise this contradiction. Ideally, I would be able to achieve commensurate goals while operating from a non-Western knowledge system. Unfortunately, I have not yet decolonised my mind to an extent that allows this.

Now some definitions. Since this is a podcast about decolonisation, it makes sense to be clear about the meaning of colonisation. Closely related to this idea is that of imperialism, which you will note is a word that resembles another word I have used repeatedly, empire. The encyclopedic reference book *Post-Colonial Studies* defines these key concepts by quoting the scholar Edward Said:

*‘“Imperialism” means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan*

*centre ruling a distant territory; “colonialism”, which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory.’*

A few notes to support these definitions. Said chose to define “colonialism” - which many consider to be an ideology or a policy - as compared to “colonisation,” which is an action. In this introductory podcast, I do not pay close attention to the distinction between these terms.

Also, since we have mentioned Said, this is an opportunity to draw attention to his seminal work and concept, Orientalism, an examination of the ways that Europeans discursively created the idea of “the Orient.” According to this discourse, “the Orient” is a vast and exotic place in the east. Within the discourse, the exotic “Orient” just is, but when reviewed with an awareness of Orientalism, it becomes clear that “the Orient” only exists in contrast to, and when seen from, the quote-unquote west, i.e., the centres of European empires like Britain and France. It is from this notion of a discursive east seen from the west that we get the term Western, as in Western knowledge systems. And it is these same Western knowledge systems that colonial powers used to justify their superiority, that is to say the superiority of European peoples over all others and the superiority of European knowledge over all other knowledge systems.

In referring to Western knowledge systems, I am referring to those that have their origins in the intellectual turns in the Renaissance and Enlightenment historical periods that emphasised objective rationality and proposed the scientific method as the ultimate tool to establish truth. This way of thinking is generally associated to the philosophy of knowledge referred to as positivism.

In this podcast I am intentionally glossing over significant philosophical nuance. Indeed, positivism has faced tremendous critique from within the so-called Western academy. If striving to decolonise, a more appropriate critique is offered through the work of Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Tuhiwai Smith’s work is grounded in the reclamation of subjugated Indigenous knowledge while also accessible to those of us raised in the ether of Western knowledge.

I do not claim that positivism is all bad and nor does Tuhiwai Smith. One problem that both she and I associate with Western knowledge is its totalitarianism - the sense that alternatives are inherently inferior, which has led to the subjugation, destruction, and loss of an infinitely valuable wealth of Indigenous knowledge systems.

In this podcast I will sidestep the chicken-and-egg question as to which came first: the Western knowledge systems or the European imperialist colonisation project? For all intents and purposes, these movements began in earnest in the 16th century and have been dominant forces ever since.

You may or may not have noticed this fact, but up to this point, I have hardly mentioned physiotherapy or physiotherapy education. It is at this point in the podcast that I will begin to relate the substantive content to our profession and our occupation.

Here are some claims that connect these dots. One, the roots of the physiotherapy profession are in biomedicine, which draws most of its philosophical foundations from positivism - whether or not this is acknowledged. Two, in physiotherapy, our knowledge generation and dissemination systems are overwhelmingly grounded in Western traditions even though we aspire to be a global profession of transcultural relevance. I propose that for those of us who are groomed and conditioned as physiotherapists and physiotherapy educators, the same knowledge systems that grew along with colonisation really are embedded quite deeply within our heads.

#### Reflection

Can you identify the ways in which your location - i.e., your people and your home - has influenced your thinking? If your thinking, like mine, has deep roots in a colonising understanding of the world, how would you go about identifying alternatives?

Resources and notes

Staehelin IM. (2000). Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples. *Cultural Survival*. https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/decolonizing-methodologies-research-and-indigenous-peoples

Ashcroft B. Griffiths G, Tiffin H. (2013). *Postcolonial studies: the key concepts* (3rd edition). London: Routledge.

This reference book is essentially an encyclopedia of concepts related to colonialism and imperialism. The first paragraphs of the entry on “Colonialism” (beginning pg 54) are particularly valuable:

“The term ‘colonialism’ is important in defining the specific form of cultural exploitation that developed with the expansion of Europe over the last 400 years. Although many earlier civilizations had colonies, and although they perceived their relations with them to be one of a central imperium in relation to a periphery of provincial, marginal and barbarian cultures, a number of crucial factors entered into the construction of the post-Renaissance practices of **imperialism**. Edward Said offers the following distinction: ‘“imperialism”means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; “colonialism”, which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory’ (Said 1993: 8).

“The scale and variety of colonial settlements generated by the expansion of European society after the Renaissance shows why the term colonialism has been seen to be a distinctive form of the more general ideology of imperialism. Although Said’s formula, which uses ‘imperialism’ for the ideological force and ‘colonialism’ for the practice, is a generally useful distinction, European colonialism in the post-Renaissance world became a sufficiently specialized and historically specific form of imperial expansion to justify its current general usage as a distinctive kind of political ideology.”

*Embedded reference*: Said, E. (1993) Culture and Imperialism, London: Chatto & Windus.

### Section 5 - Structure precedes function

#### Main message

Beyond stimulating the project of colonialism, structures can perpetuate these dynamics, even if the ownership of land is transferred and the colonists go home

#### Text

This podcast has been recorded in 2020 the year of the COVID 19 pandemic, a time during which many have rediscovered the ways that interconnected systems have direct influence upon the lives of... everyone.

Moreover, the previously mentioned #BlackLivesMatter protests have increased awareness about the nature of racism. While racism may be expressed through individual acts, it is maintained through structures. Importantly, most of these racist structures present themselves as benign and disinterested, existing in a post racial world of equal opportunity. When I think of these structures, the first that come to mind for me are housing policy, education systems, and the police. This list is not exhaustive, I kept it short because I have a time limit.

Through this intro, I hope that I have your attention on structures and systems. So it goes with colonialism and imperialism. Yes, these phenomena have occurred through the theft of specific parcels of land and the enslavement of specific individuals. Simultaneously, as I hope that you have seen through this podcast, these individual acts have been buttressed and justified through discourses and knowledge systems. Between embodied and conceptual worlds, there are multiple institutions that uphold colonial regimes - sometimes even after the stolen land has been given back to more rightful owners.

In section 3, I shared some details about the Spanish and French occupations of Haiti, using this as a concrete historical example to demonstrate the social construction of racial categories. I brought us up to the late 1700s but dropped the thread. Let's pick it up from there again.

With slaves outnumbering French colonists by a ratio of ten to one, it maybe should not be a surprise that the slaves rose up, and to my knowledge became the only example of an enslaved people overthrowing their tormentors.

If everything worked as it should, upon Independence in 1804, the self-freed slaves should have been able to control their destiny according to a radically different political and economic structure. As you can likely imagine by my foreshadowing, and possibly from Haiti being constantly identified as "the poorest country in the western hemisphere," that is not what happened.

I will pause the story of Haiti once again, this time to make a note about structures, ideas, and systems that are now taken for granted, but are in no way natural or inevitable. We will start with the idea of the global economy.

In 2020, it is relatively intuitive for us to talk about COVID19 leading to the collapse of the global economy. It is through the accumulation of much conceptual baggage that we have been able to reach an acceptance of this idea. Beyond the mind-twisting heuristic that economies are things that can be measured as growing or shrinking on percentage points, a precursor to this statement making sense is an overwhelming global buy-in to one economic system - that of capitalism. We humans have long had systems to collectively manage resources. Nonetheless, the idea that this resource management system should be premised upon the private ownership of anything that is valuable and that we should be able to quantify this value in currency to facilitate this exchange, well, that idea began in Europe. From the content of the podcast so far, you can probably guess how this idea was able to permeate around the world and crush thousands of alternative economic systems.

Also, you might have noticed that I have used the term "nation-state" on multiple occasions in this podcast. I use this as a more precise term for what we casually refer to as "countries." Like the current idea of a global economy, it is a relatively recent notion that we have a universal system whereby all land is properly assigned, exclusively, to sovereign nation-states. While there were long kingdoms, and republic's and municipalities, the idea of nation-states is usually traced back to treaties that were signed in what is now Germany in 1648.

So what does this mean for Haiti? Well, after the alliance of slaves and mulattoes defeated and expelled multiple European powers, the victors were not granted nation-statehood. Instead, they were handed a bill, from France, to compensate for the loss of property. The cruelest irony of this demand for reparations was that the main "property" that France lost was a half million slaves.

Although I have never spoken to a Haitian freedom fighter from 200 hundred years ago, my guess is that many were willing to tell France where to shove their bill.

Meanwhile, for a subset of Haitians the isolation from the world's diplomatic and economic structures, such that they were at the time, was a big problem. Accordingly, in exchange for international recognition, the independent republic of Haiti did accept the bill, in the form of debt, even though this debt was a national poverty trap from which Haiti might never escape.

Through the newly formed systems of nation states and the globalized capitalist economy France was able to generate an answer for the following question: how is it that European powers could maintain control over colonised peoples and places even after their nominal independence?

Many consider the debt crises faced by low- and middle-income countries in the 1980s and the resultant imposition of structural adjustment plans in the 1990s to be direct descendants of France's dependency experiment in Haiti. It might have taken me a lengthy example to make the point but my point is this: even after the colonists have packed up and gone home, there are structures that can keep colonial arrangements in place.

#### Reflection

What are the structures that you know in which colonising dynamics are reproduced?

Resources and notes

Ashcroft B. Griffiths G, Tiffin H. (2013). *Postcolonial studies: the key concepts* (3rd edition). London: Routledge.

The first paragraphs of the entry on the “Washington Consensus” (beginning pg 270) provide a useful presentation of a modern structure to perpetuate neo-colonialism:

“This is a term coined in 1990 to describe the general agreement among economists and Wall Street bankers about the best means to procure global economic growth. It was called the ‘Washington Consensus’ because Washington is the headquarters of most global financial institutions. The foundation was laid in 1990 by a World Bank economist, John Williamson, who compiled a list of the most widely recommended market-oriented policies: (1) Fiscal discipline (2) A redirection of public expenditure priorities toward fields offering both high economic returns

and the potential to improve income distribution, such as primary health care, primary education, and infrastructure (3) Tax reform (to lower marginal rates and broaden the tax base) (4) Interest rate liberalization (5) A competitive exchange rate (6) Trade liberalization (7) Liberalization of inflows of foreign direct investment (8) Privatization (9) Deregulation (to abolish barriers to entry and exit (10) Secure property rights.

“The language of this list spans the philosophical terrain of **neoliberalism**, with its insistence on the unfettered operation of the market. Although the principles would be unremarkable to many economists, they encompass a programme that many critics have argued is designed to both obfuscate and cement the power of the West. The term ‘Washington Consensus’ provides a useful description of World Bank and IMF ‘one size fits all’ prescriptive economic policies. It is of interest to post-colonial studies first, because it summarises neo-liberal economic policy which itself has its origins in imperial expansion, and second, because it demonstrates the way in which neo-imperial power is maintained by a persuasive ideological language, working in tandem with powerful global institutions.”

### Section 6 - Are we sure that physiotherapy “fits” everywhere? A question derived from professional experience in Haiti

#### Main message

I am pessimistic as to whether the physio “fits” everywhere; I am optimistic that the profession can offer – and learn – from its involvement in many places.

*Sub-message*: Colonising discourses can produce a taken-for-granted sense of value that can crumble under scrutiny.

#### Text

From 2008 until the end of 2010 I worked as the Coordinator of Rehabilitation Services Development at *Hôpital Albert Schweitzer* in the Artibonite Valley of rural central Haiti. Prior to starting this job, I had already lived in Haiti’s capital of Port-au-Prince for over a year. By this time I spoke Haitian Creole and had visited multiple health care centres around the country. Nonetheless, I had spent little time among the majority rural population. I was genuinely curious about the long-term trajectory of the patients who we would assess and return home from the clinic where I worked in the capital. Did our interventions achieve their intended aims? Did these make sense in the actual contexts in which the patients lived? With this background, some book knowledge about community-based rehabilitation, and some strong opinions, I was excited to be granted the role of expanding a delicate shoestring of rehabilitation services into a coherent system. I was expecting some surprises during exercise but I had no way to anticipate the ones that I would find.

Through this period, my perspectives about foreigners, including myself, evolved significantly. I entered this role most proud of my expertise and ingenuity. This emphasis was consistent with my self-conception as a solution-focused guy operating at the grassroots. My average income was typically below my own country’s poverty line, which left me a little confused as to why I was positioned as such a high-roller when in Haiti. As I reached a level of integration in the rural economy and learned about salaries and land tenure and the price of staple foods and the endless obligations towards “one’s people,” my otherwise meagre Canadian dollars seemed a treasure, far more immediately useful than the abstract value of supposed “professional expertise” that I thought that I had brought.

Whereas I appreciated the contributions of other visiting professionals, I began to tire of the way that they convinced themselves that the duration of their annual vacation to be precisely the commitment that we required. I started to gain an unusual form of respect for our local scam artists who had learned sufficient English to convince the visitors that they would return to high school if they would just have someone to sponsor them but instead cycled those dollars into the economy through the purchase of cigarettes and beer. I began to question the taken-for-grantedness of people like me being able to travel to Haiti, on our own terms, to practice our professions with essentially no barriers whereas it was at least difficult if not unthinkable for most professional Haitians to travel to and practice in our countries.

Now I will concede that the observations that I have presented thus far might be themed something like “foreseeable problems and unintended consequences of visiting naive individuals from a high-income country.” With respect to this particular package of issues, I think that the recent and growing cadre of Haitian physiotherapists working in Haiti will achieve wonders.

While the arrogance and bumbling entitlement of Western professionals might be most flagrant with our physical presence, I suspect that these same characteristics could be even more entrenched in more invasive ways.

Whereas the physiotherapy practitioners are increasingly Haitian, the fundamentals of physiotherapy practice are decidedly Western, having been imported to the country through the majority of Haitian physios who trained abroad and returned home, or through people like me - who was first recruited to Haiti to teach clinical skills without a critical consideration as to whether my Canadian skills were fit-for-purpose.

Given that it was my job to spend time in mountain villages and talk about disability and rehabilitation, I was able to gather a repertoire of observations about how physiotherapy might or might not fit there. One ominous sign was that rural Creole effectively has no word for exercise, this does not bode well for one’s primary treatment approach. Although people would seem to humour me by moving as I would suggest that they “make movements,” the idea of performing physical activity for an unseeable future benefit was not intuitive to rural villagers who spent all day doing physical activity to accomplish, well, everything. Furthermore, the idea of exercise as medicine was not consistent to their previous experiences with traditional medicine - a system that I never did come to understand - nor with their drugs and surgery experiences of Western medicine from the organisation that employed me. I take the point that maybe we could convince the villagers to come to our side with respect to our approaches and the worldviews that support these. Where I disagree is that we should devote such energy to teach people to think like us rather than taking the time to listen and learn more to think like them.

Having lived in Haiti for years, I can confirm that just like in Western countries, Haitians fracture bones and have strokes and have spinal cord injuries. Like elsewhere, a percentage of Haitian babies are born with cerebral palsy while amputations and spinal cord injuries were frequent well before these became subjects of international interest with the 2010 earthquake. My reticence to import physiotherapy to Haiti does not come from a disinterest in finding solutions to the challenges that Haitian people face. Instead, it comes from a concern of subjugating the solutions that so-called uneducated Haitians already have.

One possible example that I learned came from an elderly woman and her family in a mountain village. I met the woman because without a shared conception of physiotherapy ideas, I had asked local health workers to point me towards people who had difficulty doing things, like walking, talking, and eating. In the process, I was taken to a family that carried their grandmother multiple times per day. From the house to the sun in the morning, into the shade in the afternoon, then back into the house in the evening. Sometimes they carried her to church on Sundays. I would not have met this family had I asked to meet with people with disabilities - according to the family she was not disabled she was...grandma. I propose that if physiotherapists listened to Haitian villagers, we might have more people to spread the word that functional loss in older age was a natural phenomenon that need not be resisted, instead, its problems could be overcome with family and community solidarity. Such a lesson might have been valuable in Canada some time before March and April 2020, as COVID19 inflicted a horrific death toll on our senior citizens, or more specifically, those that we warehouse in institutions.

#### Reflection

Is it possible that striving to convince people of the value of physiotherapy is conceived with a mindset of domination that is akin to colonialism? Whatever your answer, do you have a sense of the values and the beliefs that led you to feel what you did?

Resources and notes

Cleaver S. (2016). How Function and Disability are Socially-Constructed. *rehabINK. 1(2).* https://rehabinkmag.com/previous-issues/rehabink-fall-2016-volume-1-issue-2/%20how-function-and-disability-are-socially-constructed/

Miles M. (2007). International Strategies for Disability-related Work in Developing Countries: historical, modern and critical reflections. *Independent Living Institute.*

https://www.independentliving.org/docs7/miles200701.html

Please note: M Miles’ writing can sometimes seem inflammatory to audiences who are reading it for the first time and see otherwise respected structures subjected to searing, almost antagonistic, critique. For me, who has independently had similar but less-well-formed reflections, it is refreshing to see an author who is able to effectively describe similar observations and coherently articulate their meaning.

### Section 7 - What would decolonising physiotherapy education look like?

#### Main message

Decolonisation will not be easy, but if you - like me - see that colonisation has brought on significant problems and violence, I propose that it is a moral imperative to make a commitment to decolonising. Even if it is not yet clear *precisely* what decolonising means.

#### Text

In the 22 years that I have been a member of the physiotherapy community, I have rarely seen the words “decolonising” and “physiotherapy” sit alongside each other. If we add a third word, “education,” as I was tasked to address in this InBeta Unconference, then the references are fewer still. With minimal precedence, this podcast was definitely an exploratory affair, in which most of the content was directed towards helping people perceive the ubiquitous but invisible ways that colonialism is hidden in plain view. My suspicion is that once audiences clear the barrier of seeing the unseeable, drawing support for the subsequent steps of focusing on physiotherapy and physiotherapy education will be comparatively easy.

Now that we are almost at the end of this podcast I feel a bit more comfortable to be transparent and disclose how I have felt about making this. Initially, I was elated that this subject was on the agenda and that I had been asked to speak on it. Very shortly thereafter, I was at least intimidated, maybe even frightened of the task. I had never been tasked with thinking specifically about decolonising physiotherapy to this depth, yet the timeline was short and competing obligations were intense. Although I had thought a great deal about decolonising, most of this thinking had been directed at disability and global health, not physiotherapy education. Would I be able to do this subject justice? Moreover, it's not as if no one within this profession has been thinking about these things. As a white descendant of settler-colonists, would my position allow me to see these issues effectively and prioritise appropriately?

Amid this angst, I frantically reached out for advice and any support from all the physiotherapists I know are, or at least might be, thinking about these issues too. Among the people who I contacted, I thank all who replied with encouragement. I especially thank Lisa Arcobelli, also from McGill University where I work, and Moni Fricke from the University of Manitoba, for carefully reviewing my story board and suggesting improvements. To all those who were not able to get back to me in time during this frantic pandemic period, I do hope that we are able to collaborate towards this common cause going forward.

As you might detect from the tone of this section, I do not support the idea that I should have free reign to propose a decolonisation agenda for our profession and its education programs. The folks who have the greatest expertise in this are especially our Indigenous colleagues but also Black colleagues even if non-Indigenous. Unlike the prime beneficiaries of settler colonialism and white supremacy, i.e., people like me, Black and Indigenous people are well positioned to see the problems and promote alternatives.

In addition to identifying this podcast as being about peoples and resources, especially land, there is a reason that I also identified the need to do things differently. While not being sure of exactly how we should decolonise, I do know that we need to pay attention to both method and substance. With colonisation’s triumphalism of the individual - discursively at least - and Indigenous ways of living in family and community, something tells me that innovations in decolonizing will be patently different than those proposed by Sahrmann, McKenzie, Bobath or Mulligan. As opposed to individuals, my suspicion is that the communities leading this charge might be units like the indigenous committees of the Australian and Canadian physiotherapy associations, the Maori partner association in New Zealand or the Black and Minority Ethnic therapist groups in the US and UK. I'm confident that this list of communities is not exhaustive among those that have explicit wisdom on these issues, so I apologise for any omissions.

Although I will not offer prescriptions, I will point physiotherapist colleagues to larger discussions about decolonisation happening outside our profession. One of these discussions is about Indigenising, where the focus might be less on a direct underming of the colonial project and more on the infusion of indigenous ways of knowing and being. With respect to what is specifically referred to as decolonising, there is reason to believe that there is tremendous benefit in seeking to uncover the details of colonial violence and expunge these from our systems.

Ultimately, as we are reminded by Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, *Decolonization is not a Metaphor* for expanding social justice or freeing one's mind. According to this perspective, the term decolonisation must be reserved for its literal meaning: undoing the colonial project and giving the land back to its rightful owners.

#### Reflection

What would you say that decolonising physiotherapy education looks like? Where do you see the closest opportunities to contribute to that goal?

Resources and notes

Bolton J, Andrews S. (2018) ‘I learned more than from any lecture’ – Indigenous place and space for teaching Indigenous health to physiotherapy students,

*Physical Therapy Reviews*, 23:1, 35-39, DOI: 10.1080/10833196.2017.1341744

Hojjati A, Beavis ASW, Kassam A, Choudhury D, Fraser M, Masching R,. Nixon SA. (2018) Educational content related to postcolonialism and indigenous health inequities recommended for all rehabilitation students in Canada: a qualitative study, *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 40:26, 3206-3216, DOI:10.1080/09638288.2017.1381185

Pete, S. (2016). 100 Ways: Indigenizing & decolonizing academic programs. *aboriginal policy studies,* 6(1).

Rodney, R. (2016). Decolonization in health professions education: reflections on teaching through a transgressive pedagogy. *Canadian medical education journal*, 7(3), e10.

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, education & society*, 1(1). <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630>

### Conclusion

That brings us to the end of this guided reflection podcast on the topic of decolonisation in physiotherapy education. I hope that you've found this contribution useful and that it has provided a few opportunities for you to consider your own position, as a person and within physiotherapy education. I look forward to continuing this conversation, expanding the perspectives here to include multiple positions with respect to the dynamics of colonisation and with respect to the education of our future colleagues.