DECOLONIZING MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Why, How, and What

Edited by Emamdeen Fohim

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RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

VOLUME 93

DECOLONIZING MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES

RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

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RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF
ORGANIZATIONS VOLUME 93

DECOLONIZING MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES: WHY, HOW, AND WHAT

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Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL.

First edition 2025

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83608-641-3 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-83608-638-3 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-83608-640-6 (Epub)

ISSN: 0733-558X (Series)

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FOREWORD: RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

Research in the Sociology of Organizations (RSO) publishes cutting-edge empirical research and theoretical papers that seek to enhance our understanding of organizations and organizing as pervasive and fundamental aspects of society and economy. We seek provocative papers that push the frontiers of current conversations, that help to revive old ones, or that incubate and develop new perspectives. Given its successes in this regard, RSO has become an impactful and indispensable fount of knowledge for scholars interested in organizational phenomena and theories. RSO is indexed and ranks highly in Scopus/SCImago as well as in the *Academic Journal Guide* published by the Chartered Association of Business Schools.

As one of the most vibrant areas in the social sciences, the sociology of organizations engages a plurality of empirical and theoretical approaches to enhance our understanding of the varied imperatives and challenges that these organizations and their organizers face. Of course, there is a diversity of formal and informal organizations – from for-profit entities to nonprofits, state and public agencies, social enterprises, communal forms of organizing, non-governmental associations, trade associations, publicly traded, family owned and managed, private firms – the list goes on! Organizations, moreover, can vary dramatically in size from small entrepreneurial ventures to large multinational conglomerates to international governing bodies such as the United Nations.

Empirical topics addressed by RSO include the formation, survival, and growth of organizations; collaboration and competition between organizations; the accumulation and management of resources and legitimacy; and how organizations or organizing efforts cope with a multitude of internal and external challenges and pressures. Particular interest is growing in the complexities of contemporary organizations as they cope with changing social expectations and as they seek to address societal problems related to corporate social responsibility, inequality, corruption and wrongdoing, and the challenge of new technologies. As a result, levels of analysis reach from the individual to the organization, industry, community and field, and even the nation-state or world society. Much research is multilevel and embraces both qualitative and quantitative forms of data.

Diverse theory is employed or constructed to enhance our understanding of these topics. While anchored in the discipline of sociology and the field of

management, RSO also welcomes theoretical engagement that draws on other disciplinary conversations – such as those in political science or economics, as well as work from diverse philosophical traditions. RSO scholarship has helped push forward a plethora of theoretical conversations on institutions and institutional change, networks, practice, culture, power, inequality, social movements, categories, routines, organization design and change, configurational dynamics, and many other topics.

Each volume of RSO tends to be thematically focused on a particular empirical phenomenon (e.g., creative industries, multinational corporations, and entrepreneurship) or theoretical conversation (e.g., institutional logics, actors and agency, and microfoundations). The series publishes papers by junior as well as leading international scholars and embraces diversity on all dimensions. If you are scholar interested in organizations or organizing, I hope you find RSO to be an invaluable resource as you develop your work.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I reconnected with Michael Lounsbury, the series editor of *Research in the Sociology of Organizations,* to ask him whether I still have a GO to edit a volume on "Decolonizing Management and Organization Studies," his answer was: "Yes! Go Go Go! This is important!". I want to extend my sincere appreciation to Mike for having received his trust and for having given me the opportunity to edit this volume. I also want to thank all 48 contributors for their collaboration and the several steps they took to reach this achievement. I am grateful to the Swiss National Science Foundation for covering the book processing fees necessary to publish this volume open-access. I want to thank the anonymous reviewers and the end-to-end reviewers who commented and gave valuable feedback on each paper, helping to improve the quality of this volume. Furthermore, I want to express my gratitude to Ronja Federspiel, who helped me format the entire manuscript before its submission. Finally, special thanks also go to Chintan Kella, Adeelah Kodabux, Smita Ramloll, and Metkel Yosief for their support and listening when needed.

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EMBARKING ON A JOURNEY TOWARD DECOLONIZATION

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I introduce the Decolonizing Management and Organization Studies (MOS) volume from the Research in the Sociology of Organizations *series. This volume invites scholars to embark on a journey toward decolonization, aiming to correct knowledge shaped by colonial legacies through integrating perspectives from the colonized in pursuit of human emancipation and dignity for the common good. Created as a collaborative and reflective journey, the volume is based on an open dialogue among diverse MOS scholars from across the globe. By summarizing these contributions, I illustrate how they address the main aspects of decolonization and subsequently derive a provisional list of principles that I believe are essential for advancing this critical endeavor. I call on fellow scholars to engage with these insights and join us on this journey!*

Keywords: Decolonizing; impactful research; journey; knowledge production; management and organization studies

INTRODUCTION

Antenór Firmin was a Haitian anthropologist who lived from 1850 to 1910. Raised in a working-class family in the first country in Latin America to achieve independence from European colonial rule, he became a member of the Paris

Decolonizing Management and Organization Studies: Why, How, and What
Research in the Sociology of Organizations, Volume 93, 1–14

ISSN: 0733-558X/doi:10.1108/S0733-558X20250000093001

Anthropology Society in 1884 (Fluehr-Lobban, 2005). Recognized as the first black anthropologist in the Western world (Joseph, 2021), Firmin can also be seen as a decolonization scholar (Allen & Jobson, 2016). Drawing from his upbringing in Haiti, he understood that decolonization – the undoing of colonialism – requires actions beyond the political to include other domains, such as science (Holley, 2024). In his book, *The Equality of the Human Races* (Firmin, 1885), Firmin challenged Arthur de Gobineau's (1853) *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*, which sought to legitimize racism and slavery by proclaiming the superiority of the white race. Firmin deconstructed Gobineau's arguments by exposing the lack of empirical evidence behind them and emphasizing the contributions of pre-colonial Africa to civilization (Williams, 2014). His work thus epitomizes scholarship aiming to decolonize knowledge (Joseph, 2021): *In pursuit of human emancipation and dignity for the common good, introducing perspectives from the colonized to correct knowledge that has been shaped by colonial legacies*.

This notion of the "coloniality of knowledge" has been raised by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, among other scholars. Quijano (2007) argued that since the colonization of the Americas, the prevailing system of knowledge has been dominated by a Eurocentric paradigm that is based on a Cartesian subject-object divide and claims universal truth. He views this as a colonial legacy that perpetuates the exploitation of former colonial regions, such as Latin America and Africa. Similarly, scholars such as Said (1978) have explored how concepts like Orientalism are rooted in Eurocentric prejudices and biases established during colonial times, reinforcing a sense of Western superiority. In line with these arguments, Fanon (1952) addressed the psychological effects of colonialism on the colonized. Spivak (1988) elaborates on the term "epistemic violence" to highlight how a "coloniality of knowledge" can lead to indirect violence when ignoring subalterns' voices in the production of knowledge. Thus, the decolonization of knowledge must consider the lived experiences of colonized peoples and legitimize non-Eurocentric ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). This process also calls for transforming established academic norms and structures, such as the university itself (Joseph Mbembe, 2016).

Within Management and Organization Studies (MOS), these ideas have found acceptance, particularly among scholars from Critical Management Studies (CMS) (e.g., Bruton et al., 2022; Filatotchev et al., 2021; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Jaya, 2001; Nkomo, 2011; Yousfi, 2021). They have examined a range of subjects, including the challenges faced by "periphery-based" scholars aiming to publish in top management journals (Barros & Alcadipani, 2023), the importance of political reflexivity when researching contexts affected by colonial violence (Abdelnour & Abu Moghli, 2021), the critical reassessment of theoretical concepts that perpetuate ethnocentric biases (Bothello et al., 2019), and the decolonization of business schools by creating intellectual spaces for Indigenous Peoples (Woods et al., 2022). In doing so, scholars have found that emancipatory measures extending beyond the embrace of non-Western contexts (Wickert et al., 2024) are necessary to overcome institutional barriers in academia that hamper the heterogenization of insights in MOS (Banerjee, 2021).

The decolonization of knowledge is not only a metaphor (Tuck & Yang, 2012); it embodies a political agenda (Abdelnour, 2022) while striving to achieve the fundamental scientific goals of creating, expanding, and correcting knowledge. Firmin's work exemplifies this by detailing the pre-colonial history of Africa – an account that not only delegitimizes the false notion of racial inequality but also offers a fuller depiction of the continent, countering the Eurocentric hegemony in knowledge production. In psychology, the concept of "WEIRD bias" critiques the predominance of theories derived from **W**estern, **e**ducated, **i**ndustrialized, **r**ich, and **d**emocratic countries (Henrich et al., 2010). This bias is particularly problematic in our field that seeks to conduct impactful research (Wickert et al., 2021; Williams & Whiteman, 2021) for addressing grand challenges (Gümüsay et al., 2022; Seelos et al., 2023). As MOS scholars aiming to generate impactful knowledge on management and organizing, we must recognize that many of the current insights are limited to the Western sphere. Decolonizing MOS is thus an urgent imperative for all scholars within the discipline.

This volume of *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (RSO) on Decolonizing MOS is an invitation to all MOS scholars to join in the journey toward decolonization, with the aim of creating impactful knowledge that contributes to universal dignity and the common good. In this volume, we endeavor to explain *why* decolonizing our discipline is needed, to provide ideas on *how* we, as scholars, can approach this task, and to discuss *what* aspects should be decolonized in academia. We view the decolonization of MOS not merely as a niche area for a small number of experts but as a reflective journey among all interested scholars. As illustrated by Mauritian artist Evan Sohun (www.evansohun.com) in Fig. 1, created specifically for this publication, this volume seeks to initiate a dialogue among the community of scholars (represented by the four figures in the illustration). This dialogue aims to critically reflect on entrenched academic institutions, norms, and rules (depicted as square boxes in the upper right of the image). Our goal is to redirect the flow of our field (symbolized by the river on the bottom right) toward new institutions that contain fresh and creative norms and rules while considering old elements where needed (depicted as the modified boxes in the form of a briefcase and the stairs at the bottom). In this introductory paper, I outline how this volume was created in the spirit of a reflective journey, the ways in which it can be read through this lens, and how we, as scholars, can continue to move forward along this path.

ESTABLISHING THE VOLUME AS A JOURNEY

When developing this RSO volume, we committed ourselves to the idea of a reflective journey promoting open dialogue among a variety of MOS scholars while meeting on equal footing. We acknowledge that our efforts were not flawless, and setbacks formed this process, too. For instance, because the RSO is an English-language publication, the contributors had to know English, excluding other scholars. Furthermore, most contributors were affiliated with universities,

Fig. 1. **"Passarelle" by Evan Sohun**.

thus excluding other people who could have contributed equally to this discussion. Nevertheless, in our pursuit of an inclusive approach toward decolonization, we made concerted efforts to diversify our contributor base. This included incorporating the work of scholars from different parts of the world, though we acknowledge that we still fall short of capturing the cultural diversity of global

society. Our efforts also included welcoming scholars from different stages of their careers, from PhD students to seasoned scholars, and embraced scholars with a range of views on what the decolonization of MOS might entail. We also included scholars at different stages of engagement with decolonization, from those newly encountering the literature to those deeply familiar with it.

Some might question our inclusion of less experienced voices in this debate, as well as scholars immersed in the Western academic tradition, which may seem disconnected from decolonizing efforts. However, I contend that if we want to effect institutional change in academia, we must invite all scholars on this journey regardless of their academic or cultural socialization, while being aware this approach might cause some to prefer staying away from this project. In my view, genuine transformation begins only when we engage in dialogue, see the humanity behind each other's arguments, are open to listening to each other, and take others' perspectives into account. By establishing such a dialogue, we aimed to foster what Mignolo (2000) describes as "border thinking," a practice that involves learning from and experiencing other forms of knowing, thinking, and becoming. What can unite us, in the words of Gümüsay (2023), is a shared commitment to conduct impactful research and a recognition that our current approaches allow us to understand only a fraction of the world and perpetuate a colonial legacy that contradicts our goals. This shared commitment and awareness encouraged the contributors to this volume to courageously and collectively embark on the journey toward decolonization, learning, and advancing together.

To move as contributors along this journey, we prioritized an open dialogue while developing this volume. We organized two rounds of online workshops in which all contributors could present their initial ideas and drafts to their peers, accommodating different time zones to facilitate participation. These meetings provided an opportunity for participants to learn from each other by exchanging cultural understandings and different approaches to decolonization in scholarship and knowledge production more broadly. Furthermore, many papers in the volume were collaboratively written by a diverse team of authors, enabling lively internal dialogues. Lastly, the first drafts of all papers were read and commented on by anonymous external reviewers, many of whom are experts in the literature on decolonizing MOS. This valuable feedback helped the authors refine their perspectives and reflect on their previous assumptions about academia.

READING THE VOLUME AS A JOURNEY

This volume of the RSO series has been designed to provide readers with the experience of embarking on a journey toward the decolonization of MOS. To reach a global audience, we have made the volume available as an open-access publication. We extend our gratitude to the Swiss National Science Foundation for covering the book processing fees necessary for this open-access initiative.

We begin by laying out the basics and taking stock of the literature on decolonizing MOS (Section I). We then discuss the reasons *why* decolonization is imperative for our discipline (Section II), *how* this might be done (Section III),

and *what* aspects of academia need decolonization (Section IV). The volume concludes with three explorations inviting further discussion on continuing this important work (Section V). Below, I summarize each paper and subsequently illustrate how we, as scholars, can move forward on this journey.

Section I: Opening

Lounsbury (2025) opens the volume by introducing the concept of "Decolonizing Ourselves." By elaborating on his personal story as the son of a Palestinian refugee, he outlines the institutional constraints somebody can experience when one's background is associated with a stigmatized identity. Through decolonizing ourselves, he exemplifies that we can learn and understand what the debate on decolonizing MOS can mean for ourselves as a starting point for broadening the discussion. As he points out, many of us have stories of dispossession and exploitation, more or less proximate. He thus calls on the scholarly community to work on this topic together and to find ways that allow for institutional change in our field.

The second paper of this volume, by Seremani and Bazana (2025), take stock of the literature on decolonizing MOS and then proposing future directions. The authors identify four main streams of decolonization thought, each associated with certain geographic regions: (i) postcolonial studies and postcolonialism emerging from Southeast Asia and the Middle East; (ii) neo-colonialism and African perspectives; (iii) decoloniality from Latin America, and (iv) Indigenous perspectives. Advocating for a forward-looking approach, Seremani and Bazana suggest acknowledging the different perspectives of decolonial approaches by integrating hybridity. They propose knowledge production that allows a "mixture of what existed before and after colonization." They emphasize revising epistemology and methodology to find new forms of knowledge production. Recognizing the importance of intersectionality, they argue for a deeper consideration of how multiple forms of discrimination intersect and interact. Lastly, they call on scholars to work as an academic community to develop "practical strategies for decolonizing MOS.

Section II: Why Should We Decolonize Management and Organization Studies?

In the second section of this volume, Nagaraj and Yao (2025) explore the reasons for decolonizing MOS. Using a machine-learning approach that incorporates natural language processing (NLP), they analyze the geographical origins and focus of academic articles published in six leading management journals. Their findings show a persistent Western-centric bias in MOS despite frequent claims of increasing diversity. The evidence they provide shows several substantial disparities: (i) only 15% of the studies were conducted in the context of a middle- or low-income country; (ii) as many as 67% of the articles were authored by teams based entirely in the United States (US); and (iii) the US remains one of the most frequently studied contexts, even by researchers outside the country. Their findings suggest that knowledge production if it is to be truly impactful beyond the

Western sphere, requires fundamental institutional changes like those discussed by decolonization scholars.

James et al. (2025) further explore the imperative for decolonizing entrepreneurship studies. Contrary to the prevalent economic focus in Western entrepreneurship literature, the authors propose understanding entrepreneurship as a universal human desire to discover and innovate by evolving from the old. They argue that Western theories may not fit the needs of Indigenous people. To address this, the authors suggest opening both eyes by combining elements of existing entrepreneurship insights with Indigenous knowledge. Through examples of Indigenous conceptual frameworks, they shed light on alternative models of entrepreneurship that are effective in Indigenous contexts. They emphasize how collaborating with Indigenous people on equal footing can lead to knowledge that finally matters for the communities – an approach they understand as a "moral imperative to redress harms of colonization."

Driven by a similar ambition, Auerbach Jahajeeah et al. (2025) argue that conducting impactful research to address today's grand challenges – such as climate change, digitalization, and conflicts – requires the decolonization of research partnerships. Introducing the concepts of the "minority world" (covering regions usually viewed as the West) and the "majority world" (covering regions traditionally referred to as the Global South), they highlight the discrepancy that, while grand challenges are universal, the knowledge typical used to tackle them mostly originates from minority world scholars. For this reason, they call for rethinking research partnerships and provide examples of how inclusive partnerships among minority and majority world scholars could be designed. Drawing on their own experiences, they describe a process for developing such partnerships that evolves from ignorance to awareness and integration, ultimately leading to elevation.

Section III: How Can We Decolonize Management and Organization Studies?

Chrispal (2025) continues the thoughts on decolonizing MOS by critically examining how research practices might be complicit in perpetuating epistemic violence, particularly when working with often silenced and marginalized people. Reflecting on her fieldwork with women in India who have faced gendered violence, she realized the risk of epistemic violence inherent in applying research standards from the Global North to a Global South context. Chrispal shows how standards of ensuring safe spaces during interviews, anonymizing interview participants, adhering to strict interview protocols and procedures, and translating interviews must be adapted so that they function ethically when working with marginalized people. While she stops short of providing a one-size-fits-all methodological toolkit, she urges MOS scholars to be reflective when conducting research in such critical contexts to ensure they do not inadvertently cause harm.

Considering that decolonizing knowledge requires understanding people's lived experiences, Uda (2025) introduces phenomenology as a methodological approach, focusing on the first-person perspective to understand how people experience a phenomenon. Uda outlines which ingredients of this approach differ from those

of a positivist one, emphasizing how, instead of objectivity, phenomenology strives for intersubjectivity. Using the Japanese workplace concept of *sasshi* – anticipating others' intentions even if they do not communicate them explicitly – as an example, Uda demonstrates how phenomenology can deliver insights within cultural contexts that might initially be unfamiliar to researchers. Thus, phenomenology can serve not only as an approach to deepening understanding without Western lenses but also as a means to challenge and expand MOS theories beyond Western paradigms, contributing to the decolonization of knowledge.

Ginting-Szczesny et al. (2025) further develop this phenomenological approach by conceptualizing place within a specific geographic context. Through their research with home-based women entrepreneurs in rural Central Java, Indonesia, they discovered how "home as a place" is experienced and shaped differently compared to European and North American contexts. The authors show the importance of taking context seriously and provide examples of how this can be done. In doing so, they demonstrate how a phenomenology of place can help avoid the use of Western standards to understand non-Western forms of being, doing, and knowing. Their work calls for the adoption of place-sensitive research methods to prevent epistemic violence and to facilitate the integration of non-Western knowledge and perspectives into MOS theories.

Section IV: What Aspects of Management and Organization Studies Should Be Decolonized?

In Section IV of this volume, Henry (2025) addresses the need to decolonize institutional arrangements within academia and the field of MOS. She identifies the curriculum as a critical area for decolonization, drawing on her experiences in developing a Māori Indigenous Business minor. By providing a brief historical overview from the Māori perspective, Henry reminds us of the harm done to the Indigenous population and the negative consequences it has had on maintaining local knowledge. Thanks to the newly established program, traditional Māori knowledge (mātauranga) is now taught by aligning it with traditional pedagogy (akonga). Henry attributes the successful implementation of the minor to several factors: strategic academic leadership, the engagement of Māori Indigenous expertise, and consultation with the target communities. She concludes that while the decolonization of knowledge in academia cannot be fully achieved overnight, substantial progress can be achieved by changing the university curriculum.

In turn, Asiedu et al. (2025) examine the role of education in decolonizing MOS through virtual exchange courses connecting students from Global South and Global North contexts. They reflect on the process of designing their joint course "Public Sector Management, Reforms, and Innovation," which connected master's students from the University of Botswana and the University of Bern. Using an Ubuntu framework (Dennis et al., 2018) as an analytical lens, they assessed the decolonializing potential of their educational approach. The authors conclude that such courses can uphold high standards and resemble an epistemological "Third Space" as described by Seremani and Clegg (2016), allowing the coexistence of different worldviews through dialogue. However, these courses