

DEAR DIARY: REIMAGINING ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND PUBLISHING FROM AN INTERSECTIONAL DECOLONIAL LENS

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This paper interrogates the colonial foundations and enduring inequities embedded in academic publishing and peer review. Written collaboratively by three community psychologists committed to decolonial praxis, it weaves together narrative, critique, and lived experience to expose how scholarly systems often function as mechanisms of epistemic control rather than dialogue. Dominant models of peer review—framed as neutral and objective—frequently demand conformity to Euro-Western norms of knowledge, structure, and language, marginalizing work rooted in relationality, politics, and community accountability. Drawing from personal composite experiences through archetypal “diary” entries, the authors trace how coloniality operates through seemingly routine academic processes, including reviewer feedback, grant evaluations, and publication norms. Rather than follow conventional academic form, the paper itself enacts refusal of linear argument, abstraction, and the performance of objectivity. It embraces recursive structure, layered reflection, and voice to model an alternative mode of scholarly engagement. This is not a traditional empirical study; it is an archive of affective labor, epistemic violence, and resistance within academic ecosystems. We critique the corporatization of knowledge and the structural exclusion of scholars from the Global South and other marginalized communities. We conclude with decolonial recommendations aimed at transforming peer review, research training, institutional power, and scholarly accountability. This paper is not an appeal for inclusion in a flawed system, but a call to reimagine scholarly practice altogether. It offers an embodied, grounded vision of knowledge-making that values justice, complexity, and care—inviting readers to slow down, listen deeply, and join in building something better.

Keywords: Academic Resistance, Publishing Politics, Academic Gatekeeping, Decoloniality, Peer Review, Epistemic Violence

1. Dear Diary: Reimagining Academic Knowledge Production and Publishing from an Intersectional Decolonial Lens

For decades, scholars have interrogated the colonial legacies of academic research and publishing (Cavazzoni et al. 2025; Udah, 2024; Boyd et al., 2020; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). During times of imperial expansion, documentation has served as a tool to establish, circulate,

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maintain and legitimize knowledge and control generated through conquest (i.e., worship of the written word as a tool of white supremacy; Okun, 1999). The first academic journal reportedly originated in Europe, reflecting a specific historical and cultural context that privileged written, codified forms of knowledge. This often ignored or deliberately erased scientific advancements conveyed through oral or alternative formats among conquered civilizations (Sarkar et al., 2024). This legacy continues today through empirical gatekeeping which decides who gets to define knowledge, who gets to know about it, who gets to speak about it and who gets to be heard. Today, the most powerful journals remain concentrated in the Global North, and white individuals are still overrepresented on editorial boards and publishing companies (Liu et al., 2023). In consequence, the values that shape what counts as rigorous, credible or worthy are rooted in Euro-Western epistemologies (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008).



Figure 1. Who we are and our positions in the world. Left to Right: Hana Shahin, Kyrah K. Brown, Mazna Patka

We write as three community psychologists committed to decolonial praxis. Our work is grounded in lived experience, relational critique, and the politics of knowledge. We do not offer a tidy thesis or a linear argument. Instead, we present something layered, recursive, and human—structured to reflect how our conversations unfolded: sometimes sharply, sometimes tenderly, often circling back to the same questions from different angles. Our structure mirrors the conversations we had—honest, looping, messy, and real. This paper is structured through composite diary entries (presented in italics)—an archetypal scholar whose journey reflects our

own. This composite academic is a synthesis of multiple real life academic experiences into a single, resonant persona. This character is used to explore the complexity, contradictions and emotional truths of scholarly life in a cohesive and effective way than individual accounts might allow.

These diary entries are not anecdotal; they are method. Our method is rooted in refusal: refusal to detach, refusal to perform objectivity. We draw from decolonial feminist methodologies that center reflexivity, relationality, and situated knowledge. We do not aspire to generalizability. We write from within and against the academy, holding space for contradiction, grief, and clarity that comes and goes. Our dairy entries trace how coloniality operates through the everyday rituals of academic publishing: reviewer feedback, grant evaluations, editorial decisions, and the subtle disciplining of voice, method, and politics.

This paper is also a critique of the structural logics that shape academic legitimacy. Peer review, tenure, citation metrics, and journal rankings are not neutral—they are technologies of coloniality. They reward proximity to Euro-Western norms and punish deviation. They elevate abstraction over accountability, detachment over relationality, and performance over integrity. WE name this not to appeal for inclusion, but to call for transformation.

We invite readers to move slowly. To linger. To listen. This is not a text that rewards skimming. It asks for a different kind of reading—one that honors complexity, discomfort, and care. Through this structure, we model an alternative mode of scholarly engagement. One that values justice over polish. One that refuses to quiet the truths that do not fit.

Throughout this paper, we reflect on our positionalities and our deep location in decolonial thought and practice. We do not attempt to define decoloniality in fixed terms. We analyze examples of reviewer feedback we have received, paying attention to the ways language is used to discipline, exclude, and delegitimize. This is not an argument-built point-by-point. It is a conversation held in fragments, reflections, and returns, the kind of conversations that are rarely talked about - personal and deep...what we may only write in our diaries. With this in mind, we invite you into our diary. Into the private notes, moments, and thoughts we once wrote only for ourselves.

1.1 Dear Diary, I found my calling

I was an undergraduate student when I found community psychology, and something just clicked. Finally, here was a field that talked about justice, about real change, about creating something better for all people. Not just making surface-level fixes, but rethinking how entire systems operate—not just in slogans, but in action. It wasn't about fixing individuals; it was about reimagining the systems that produce harm in the first place. People were naming power, colonialism, and oppression out loud. It felt radical, urgent, and honest. I remember thinking: this is where I'm meant to be.

When I got accepted into a PhD program, I felt like I had been welcomed into that world. A space where ideas could disrupt, where we could unlearn and rebuild. But that feeling didn't last. It didn't take long to realize that the work I wanted to do, the questions I wanted to ask, didn't really fit. There were rules. Unspoken ones, but firm. I kept bumping up against invisible lines about what counts as "real" knowledge, what counts as valid, and who gets to decide. And at the center of it all were a few people, almost always those deeply rooted in whiteness, in imperial

ways of knowing, who had the power to say yes or no. Fluent in the language of “inclusion,” “diversity,” “cultural competence” or “multiculturalism,”... they appear progressive, but only within the boundaries that keep them comfortable.

When I first discovered qualitative research and decolonial theory, I felt like I had found a language that finally made sense. Everything clicked—power, history, lived experience, resistance. I was hungry to learn more, to question everything, to imagine better ways of doing research. My professors encouraged curiosity, but gently redirected me anytime I tried to push too hard. “Maybe save that for later,” they’d say. “It’s not feasible for this assignment.” At first, I thought they were just helping me manage expectations. Now I wonder if they were teaching me to soften my fire, to play safe. I didn’t yet know how deeply political academic publishing is—or how quickly bold ideas are labeled “impractical.” I thought I was entering a space of inquiry. I didn’t realize I was entering a cycle of epistemic containment.

1.2 Dear Diary, I got my first review!

I successfully defended my dissertation which was a community-based participatory qualitative research study. I got the Graduate Student of the Year Award, it gave me the boost of confidence I needed after doing all the work. I made my family and professors proud. 💖 Although the journey was tough, I powered through, worked extra hard, yet kept my head down.

I got my dream job, Assistant Professor. I’m a prac-academic! 🎉 It is now time for me to go out there and do the research I want, implement all I have learned, and publish my work.

I submitted my work for publication. The process was complicated, and I am sure that the reviewers intended to give me valuable feedback that will benefit my work and help me grow—after all, academic peer review is often seen as a safeguard for research integrity, designed to strengthen ideas and maintain high academic standards. But after receiving my first set of reviewer comments, I’m feeling... something else. Discouraged? Maybe a little betrayed. It’s not that I expected praise, but I did not expect vague dismissals, contradictory feedback or what feels like someone guarding a gate I wasn’t told existed. I spent months shaping that piece of myself into a paper, only to be told that it didn’t fit. Even more discouraging for me are the multiple rejections of the same kind from reviewers who seemingly didn’t understand qualitative inquiry or community-based participatory research. Little did I know it would take me three years to successfully publish my dissertation work.

Still, Dear Diary, I won’t let this stop me. I will revise, I will resubmit.

Academic peer review is often described as a quality control mechanism, a way to ensure scholarly rigor and uphold standards. But when those standards are rooted in colonial logics, the process becomes less about quality and more about containment. For a brief history of academic peer review, see Atherton et al. (2024). For scholars whose work emerges from decolonial praxis, peer review can feel like an encounter with something far more insidious than critique. It can be a demand to translate, to soften, to strip our work of the context, complexity, and community it is accountable to.

What makes this more than just a frustrating experience is the way academic institutions uphold and depend on peer review as a central pillar of scholarly legitimacy. For many of us, our value as faculty is measured by how much of our work survives this system. Annual reviews,

tenure files, promotion cases, all hinge on the assumption that peer review is neutral and necessary. The gatekeeping is not incidental. It is built in. It confronts us with a choice to speak from our truths or speak in ways the system will allow.

1.3 Dear Diary, The System Isn't Broken, It's Working as Designed

I've published a few articles now, and I should feel accomplished. But mostly, I feel disoriented. The peer review process, which I was told would help sharpen my work, has often felt like a wall. Not just of critique, but of dismissal. Reviewers skim past context, misread intention, or suggest removing "political language" as if justice and neutrality can coexist. I was once told my methods were "too emotional" and my framework "too radical." I rewrote that paper four times and still got a rejection.

Everyone says, "It gets easier in mid-career," like that's the reward. But why should I have to wait to be free? Why is freedom in this field something that comes later, if at all? I'm learning that publishing isn't about brilliance—it's about endurance. And diplomacy. And knowing which part of yourself to quiet down.

I thought becoming faculty would open up more space to do meaningful work. But instead, the boundaries tightened. The pressure to publish became everything, and not just to publish, but to do so within a very narrow idea of what research should be. Your topic has to be palatable. Your methods must align with a specific tradition. Your citations need to include the "right" voices. And the journals? Controlled by insular networks that guard their power. Peer review isn't conversation—it's control.

Now, I see a different version of the same game. Peer review often feels detached, like the reviewers are just checking boxes without understanding the work. Sometimes, it's even more transactional—people buying authorship, guaranteed SCOPUS publications, and entire ecosystems built on performance, not integrity. Increasingly, faculty are bombarded with heavy teaching loads while still being expected to publish as if they're in full-time research roles. The result? Many end up outsourcing research—paying individuals or companies that promise publication in SCOPUS indexed journals. Teaching becomes the visible labor, while research becomes a purchased product. Is this really what research and publishing are about? It's hard to call it broken when it's functioning exactly as designed—to protect power, reward proximity to it, and gatekeep whose knowledge matters.

1.4 Dear Diary, Knowledge is Colonized

Lately, I've been thinking about how much of academia feels like a locked room with only a few holding the keys. Being a practitioner for years before joining academia doesn't really count. It's all about how much you have published. The actual work that made a difference in real-world contexts is dismissed if it isn't published in prestigious journals. Instead, the number of citations becomes the currency of value. So I find myself having to channel all my energy into producing work that fits mainstream expectations, just so it might be cited. But if I continue to write about the communities I care about, the ones I relate to, I risk being overlooked altogether.

I am realizing the issue runs deeper than the struggle to publish; It is about whose knowledge is valued, and why. The more I learn, the clearer it becomes: this isn't a system that accidentally

overlooks certain voices. It was structured this way from the start. Academic publishing was never a neutral platform for the free exchange of ideas—it originated as a mechanism of empire, used to legitimize knowledge extracted through conquest and to determine which perspectives deserved preservation. That colonial legacy remains embedded in the system. Today, the most influential journals are concentrated in the Global North, controlled by institutions and individuals whose worldviews often diverge from those of my community. What is deemed “credible” or “rigorous” still overwhelmingly reflects Western epistemologies, while alternative ways of knowing are routinely overlooked or devalued.

It’s painful to realize that the barriers I face aren’t bugs in the system—they’re features.

It is not a coincidence. The exclusions, the erasures, the silencing. They are not accidental. Academic publishing is not just influenced by colonial logics. It was built on them. From the beginning, the system was designed to serve particular interests, to elevate particular voices, and to protect particular ways of knowing. What we see now is not a broken version of something that was meant to be inclusive. This is the system working exactly as intended.

The roots of academic publishing are colonial. Journals emerged during times of imperial expansion, as tools to document, circulate, and legitimize knowledge generated through conquest. They were never about open inquiry. They were about control. They were about deciding who gets to know, who gets to speak, and who gets to be heard. That legacy continues. Editorial boards are still overwhelmingly rooted in Euro-Western epistemologies.

2. From Our Lived Archives [Method Section]

We do not present ourselves as objective observers, nor do we claim distance from the material we engage. Our method is grounded in lived experience, in relational critique, and in the careful reading of the everyday violences embedded in academic systems. The materials we work with (i.e., peer review comments on a grant proposal and journal articles), are not neutral artifacts. These documents are sites of power. They reflect not only the reviewers’ judgments, but also the institutional frameworks that give those judgments weight. A single comment can determine whether a grant is funded or a manuscript is published. More than that, these texts carry the authority to shape careers, redirect research agendas, and signal which forms of knowledge are seen as legitimate. Reviewers encode expectations about language, tone, method, and even the political positioning of the researcher. What appears as feedback is often a performance of gatekeeping, where the reviewer is positioned as an expert and the author as someone to be corrected, disciplined, or silenced. Often shielded by anonymity and tradition, reviewers speak with unchecked power—rarely challenged, never accountable.

We wrote this manuscript together, read aloud, interrupted each other, rejected tidy conclusions, and returned to earlier drafts. This recursive movement is informed by relational decolonial practices that view knowledge as co-produced and situated rather than discovered from nowhere. The method is embodied, messy, nonlinear. It is rooted in refusal — refusal to detach, refusal to translate, refusal to pretend that the epistemic violence of peer review is incidental.

This method does not aspire to neutrality or generalizability. It is specific to this writing, these reviews, and these lives. It is an archive of how coloniality operates in real time within academic institutions. It is also a refusal of conventional forms of academic legitimacy, a refusal embodied in our writing style and content.

The peer review texts include one grant review for a proposal studying low-income expatriate workers in the UAE through qualitative methods, one journal review for a qualitative study exploring the perspectives of people with developmental disabilities, and one journal review critiquing a paper engaging with decolonial framings of localization versus internationalization. We hold these reviews as data in their own right. We interpret them reflexively, alongside each other and in relationship with our own experiences as scholars. This aligns with decolonial feminist methodologies that emphasize reflection, situatedness, and the political nature of research. Reflexivity surfaces how researcher positionality and institutional logics shape knowledge production. As Pillow (2003) explains, reflexivity is not simply a gesture of inclusion, but a practice of disrupting comfort and complicity in research. Research is never neutral.

Our analytic practice is interpretive, iterative, and dialogic. We move between the texts of reviews, the contexts in which they were produced, and our collective conversations about them. We did not code or quantify. Instead, we read for patterns of erasure, discipline, and epistemic control, drawing on decolonial epistemologies to guide our interpretations. The concept of the coloniality of knowledge offers a grounding for understanding how peer review reinforces dominant logics and delegitimizes others (Jimenez & Lee, 2022; Quijano & Ennis, 2000). We are also guided by the recognition that methodologies must hold space for multiplicity, contradiction, and relationality, particularly when working across different systems of meaning and power (Lugones, 2007).

This is not just about history. It is happening now. When Mazna and Hana submitted a grant proposal to study the lives of low-income migrant workers in the UAE using qualitative methods, we received reviews that revealed a misunderstanding of qualitative inquiry. For context, we are often inundated with researchers from the West criticizing “human rights violations” against low-income workers in the UAE, but when Mazna and Hana have met with low-income workers, they define human rights violations in a way that does not translate to what is acknowledged in places like the US. They often leave their home countries due to Western imperialism (e.g., military occupation, economic exploitation) and choose to come to the UAE to help their families survive in their home countries. They figure out how to make things work for them in the UAE; no one wants to leave their homeland and families, but they feel forced to leave due to Western imperialism. We quickly realized that the literature on low-income workers in the UAE was predominantly shared through the lens of the West, so we wanted to conduct interviews to explore a different perspective. Similarly, Kyrah had an experience with a qualitative paper where journal editors and reviewers were simply ignorant about qualitative research and disregarded its value as a social science.

2.1 Dear Diary, We didn't fit their Science

We got the grant reviews back for our proposal on migrant workers.

One reviewer wrote that “the proposal has a major weakness in already having a bias and a pre-study conclusion that hinders this inquiry from being scientifically valid.” That line stayed with

me. It's not just because of what it assumed, but because of what it erased. They interpreted our reconnaissance work, our choice to begin from lived knowledge, community conversations, and observed patterns, as a sign we had already "decided" the outcome. But that's not a flaw in our design. That is our design. Reflexivity isn't bias. It's accountability. We do not have existing literature about this; we needed to start somewhere, give a voice. They also commented that our aim to "shed light on the opportunities UAE provides for workers and their families," insisting that even mentioning challenges positioned us as having "already drawn the conclusion." They accused us of not being "balanced," of proposing a "counter-narrative despite the participants' own experience" — as if the dominant narrative isn't already violently imbalanced. They are suggesting that this desire for a counter-narrative made the work unscientific, even though the whole point was to challenge dominant frames that erase the lived experiences of these workers.

They asked for things that made no sense for the kind of qualitative, decolonial inquiry we do. A reviewer asked, "why did you want to use purposeful sampling instead of random sampling?" The reviewers also wanted a larger sample. Our sample size was 40-60 participants for individual interviews! That is large for a qualitative study. Reviewers asked, "why don't we triangulate with documents or observations to 'improve reliability'?" Reliability?!!!! This does not apply to qualitative research because the goal is not replicability, but rather trustworthiness and depth of contextual understanding grounded in reflexive and interpretive processes. What are they even talking about...we are not conducting a quantitative study. They were measuring our work with tools that don't apply.

Why didn't we "specify what top journals" we'd publish in, or name "what we'll deliver to the UAE government"? It seemed like all they were focused on was positivist research methods and publishing, not the real-world impact.

Each question wasn't just logistical, yet epistemological, they also focused on terms that felt unfamiliar or "unclear" to them; "what are protective factors, protecting from what...". They were asking us to perform a version of science that keeps its hands clean and its subjects at a distance. We revised the entire proposal. Still rejected...with NO additional information.

They didn't just reject our work. They rejected the world in which that work makes sense.

2.2 Dear Diary, it happened again 🙄

My colleagues and I recently published a manuscript for a qualitative study focused on the perspectives of participants from a community-based intervention program. I find myself reflecting on the journey to get here. We submitted this manuscript to four journals in the health sciences field. The first three journal editors rejected this manuscript because community perspectives were not 'novel' and the reviewers for the fourth journal accepted after four grueling revision cycles. The initial editorial desk rejections consistently reported that our study did not contribute anything new to the literature. There were even suggestions rooted in a positivist paradigm whereby quantitative analysis (i.e., testing associations, testing impact of program on participants) was desired despite being outside the scope and methodological aims of the study.

During our rounds of revisions with the final journal, we found ourselves repeatedly clarifying qualitative inquiry, foundational socio-behavioral theories, and methodological expectations that appeared inconsistent with the study's aims. Our team included one member whose primary language is not English and three members whose primary language is English—yet the feedback focused

disproportionately on language, often overshadowing substantive engagement with the study's findings and contributions. In our experience, US-based journals tend to have copywriting services that address grammar and syntax. For a reviewer to devote such extensive attention to these issues while minimally engaging with the substantive contributions of the work is consistent with broader forms of methodological and epistemic gatekeeping.

The reviewer could have provided constructive feedback, but the comments often emphasized deficiencies rather than the development of the work. This was incredibly frustrating and raised questions about editorial oversight and the evaluation of reviewer feedback.

A few memorable comments from the four rounds include:

- *Please organize the barrier themes in terms of their “weight” or clearly state how they are reported.*
- *Another major issue that I continue to have with the manuscript is the amount of misplaced and dangling modifiers (grammar). It makes for an uneasy read that I certainly do not appreciate. Here is an extensive list of sentences for the authors to correct: lines 65-66, 77-79, 92-95, 131-135, 163-166, 218-219, 222-223, 228-230, 232-233, 258-259, 262-263, 263-264, 266-267, 270-273, 275-277, 277-279, 279-281, 359-361, 423-425, 431-433, 455-456, 471-473, 486-488, 499-501, 507-509, 517-519, 528-530, 530-532, 551-555, 557-559, 579-581, 581-586, 597-599, 607-610.*
- (🙄 This is a comment from the third round of revisions): *The use and amount of misplaced and dangling modifiers:
I provided a long list of these sentences so that you could do some editing and present clearer ideas to the readers of [this journal]. Unfortunately, there were even some new ones provided in your new set of edits. Again, as a reviewer, I would like to relay my dissatisfaction with the little attention paid to this important detail. Here is a list again for the editors and you to consider changing sentence structures for the ease of reading: Lines 25-27, 35-36, 61-63, 80-83, 104-106, 116-121, 140-143, 176-177, 217-218, 234-235, 237-239, 240-241, 243-245, 248-249, 262-263, 267-270, 274-275, 282-284, 289-292, 293-294, 294-295, 295-296, 296-297, 298-299, 309-310, 310-314, 406-407, 410-412, 442-444, 474-475, 580-582.*
- *Lincoln and Guba (1986) are cited for trustworthiness purposes. Please find a more recent citation to support this attempt at trustworthiness.*
- *Transferability: I think I see a subtle push for generalizability in this category, although the authors do suggest that it is not possible through the limitation section. I suggest rewriting the "strategies applied in the present study" category to limit the study findings to their own context or eliminate the category altogether.*

The same dynamics surfaced again when Mazna and Hana submitted a paper lightly informed by decolonial theory, focused on localization versus internationalization in education in the UAE. Here, they qualitatively examined the process of how Zayed University localized a course imported from a US-based company. The localization effort was largely superficial where Westernized names were changed to Arabic names. The paper questioned motivations for localization along with how localization was defined in an effort to inform future practice for localizing content but also encouraged placing UAE and regional epistemologies at the forefront of curriculum.

2.3 Dear Diary, “Simplistic” Is How They Described it

The localization paper didn’t make it through. Again.

The feedback was long, academic, and belittling. Our use of terms like “the West” and “white perspectives” was called “very simplistic and possibly inappropriate.” They asked us to replace it with a more “sensitive and inclusive” framing. But what they wanted wasn’t inclusion — it was avoidance. Erasure disguised as civility. How uncomfortable did we make them feel?!?!

They told us to “move away from a fairly simplistic statement such as ‘the West’” and to “review the concept of ‘localisation’ with care and sensitivity,” as if we aren’t living inside that complexity, entangled in its contradictions across our identities— personally, politically, pedagogically.

They advised detachment: “the authors are emotionally connected to the data and therefore not guaranteeing an objective perspective.” They want to dismiss our reflexivity; we have identified our positionality to further explain our reflexivity. Removing personal connection to be more objective, as though detachment from lived experience is the standard for validity. They said our work lacked depth because it made power too visible. They said our words were “stark” when we meant them to be clear. They wanted soft language.

They questioned the “limited dataset,” the lack of a “detailed literature review on American curricula,” and our framing of localization as something beyond “taking some words out of a lesson plan.” They wanted more citations, more distance, more abstraction.

But what they really wanted was less of us, less reflexivity, more quantifiable data.

The most disheartening and disrespectful comment was after one reviewer suggested we “educate” ourselves. They suggested we “begin by exploring the latest literature on the global outlook in HE, and the diversity of HE, its major players”, they also provided us with some literature and then wrote this: “This should help the authors appreciate the diversity of HE as a focus moving away from the rather stark but lacking depth internationalisation v localisation approach. The students joining the university in the Middle East probably wish to study courses originating in the UK or the US because of the global perspectives (otherwise they wouldn’t be offered there).” How can they see that this is appropriate to state? They are dismissing any decolonial act and blaming the victim. NO, western knowledge is imposed on in West Asia; epistemicide at its best is what is offered, not what the people want. They didn’t reject our arguments. They rejected our way of knowing.

At the heart of these exchanges is not just disagreement. It is an axiological and epistemological mismatch. Many of us come to this work grounded in relationality, accountability, and the refusal to separate knowledge from life. We do not see knowledge as something to own, but something to be in relation with. But academic publishing demands something else. It expects distance. It rewards abstraction. It wants methods without people, theory without politics.

What these experiences show is that peer review is not just a mechanism for feedback. It is a mechanism of control. It maintains the boundaries of what is “speakable”. It polices how knowledge is framed, whose knowledge is trusted, and what forms are allowed to carry weight. And when we step outside of that — even gently — we are reminded of where the limits are.

This is why we write the way we do. Not because we cannot write in the language of the academy, but because we choose not to. The form of this paper is part of its politics. It refuses to

perform objectivity for the sake of credibility. It refuses to separate reflection from analysis, narrative from theory, voice from argument. The structure of this work reflects our insistence that decolonial writing cannot live in the margins of a dominant form. It must reshape the form itself. We know that some will call this paper lacking in rigor. We know that some will say it is not academic enough. We have heard it before. What we offer here is not a performance of legitimacy. It is a practice of liberation.

2.4 Dear Diary, trying to change the System While Caught in It

I am now the one mentoring others and reviewing papers. I thought this would be the stage where I could finally do the work my way. But the deeper in I go, the more I see how tightly the system holds on. Even as I push for changes—more space for qualitative methods, reviewer guidelines that recognize different epistemologies—it feels like swimming against a current that never lets up.

People say, “You’re at the table now,” but it’s a table built on centuries of exclusion. Change is slow, and the costs (e.g., marginalization, lack of resources and institutional supports) of pushing too hard still falls on those of us trying to make room for something different. I worry that in trying to reform the system from within, I’ve begun to internalize its limits. But I keep going. Not because the system makes it easy—but because someone, somewhere, needs to know it’s possible to refuse and still remain.

Academic and research ecosystems are shaped by profit motives and exclusionary practices. Major academic publishers are corporations, charging exorbitant article processing charges for open access. These publishing institutions are profiting from subscription fees while relying on unpaid labor from scholars, the authors, reviewers, and editors, while giving scholars and institutions who can’t afford the fees a lower chance in the game. Fewer open-access publications that are recognized by universities means people have less options for making their work accessible to the public. So, when work is stuck behind a paywall, people are not able to cite it as often. If it isn’t cited, our work is simply sitting in an electronic library collecting e-dust. In addition, we are penalized further when others do not cite our work, where our employers evaluate us based on our h-index, stuck in bibliometric inequity. Marginalized groups and countries with low gross domestic product are most impacted because they are less likely to be cited (Klebel, & Ross-Hellauer, 2023; Nassiri-Ansari et al., 2024; Sengupta, 2021).

Scholars are pushing back by declining unpaid peer review for profit-driven publishers, supporting community-led open-access initiatives, and developing citation practices that highlight marginalized voices. Others resist through slow scholarship, collective authorship to countering competition and loneliness, affect-led methodologies, deepening reflexivity, and prioritizing knowledge translation over traditional publication cultures while questioning the power of research dynamics (Campbell et al. 2024). I need to figure out how I can get my institution to see the value in this. I must figure this out.

Working within flawed systems demands strategic compromise. Scholars committed to equity must continually ask: how can I meet institutional demands without reproducing harm? Integrity

means mentoring others, building solidarity networks, and refusing practices—like exclusive citation or elitist publishing—that betray our values. But honestly, the culture should change. The capitalistic and corporate culture should be addressed. Scholars should not be judged on their business and numerical output. We need to value care, collaboration, and quality over speed and metrics, reclaiming time to think and write, saying no to unreasonable demands, and organizing for institutional change (Mountz et al., 2015). These practices reframe slowness as a political act that prioritizes well-being, and relationality.

Peer review should be restructured to be developmental rather than punitive. Review decisions—especially rejections or "major revisions"—often act as gatekeepers, limiting the dissemination of critical or unconventional knowledge. The peer review system lacks transparency, consistency, and empirical grounding, and calls for reforms such as open review models and reviewer training are needed (Tennant & Ross-Hellauer, 2020). They emphasize the need for evidence-based research on peer review practices to create a more equitable, accountable, and effective system. There is a need for reforms, increased transparency, training, broader and decolonial review processes, post-publication engagement, data-driven evaluation, technological support, and institutional recognition of peer review as scholarly labor (Aczél et al., 2025). We need to move beyond traditional pre-publication gatekeeping to a post-publication, community-driven peer review model (Bright & Heesen, 2022).

We must decenter academic capital by removing article processing charges (APCs), delinking knowledge production from profit, and rejecting the presence of journals on stock exchanges. Simply knowing the effects on APCs of limiting knowledge and further excluding scholars (Klebel & Ross-Hellauer, 2023) should be enough to make a change. We must stop publishing in journals with required APCs. Although these publishing conglomerates often express concern about removing or reducing fees, research from one of these companies shows that waiving APCs for authors from the 47 UN designated Least Developed Countries is financially feasible. It also expands knowledge production, increases access for scholars who are routinely excluded, and supports more ethical and equitable global participation in publishing (Taubert et al., 2020). But this is a superficial handout that continues to exploit our labor that we are required by our employers to give to capitalists for free. Publishing companies benefit from our intellectual labor without direct compensation, particularly in contexts where authors are expected to submit, revise, and promote their work without financial support. It even depends on peer reviewers who also are not compensated for their labor. Some may view this as a form of mutual investment—where authors gain visibility or prestige. But let's be honest: the underlying dynamics reflect a system where making money is prioritized over equitable exchange. Our forced participation highlights how embedded we all are in a system that commodifies knowledge while obscuring the labor that sustains it.

We must disengage from such practices. We are not only questioning knowledge production but mostly fighting the capital neoliberal system of publication. Alternative models could include cooperative publishing platforms run by academic communities or open peer review systems grounded in transparency and mutual learning. Such models would not only dismantle current hierarchies, but also force institutions to rethink how faculty contributions are assessed, evaluated, and rewarded—moving beyond impact factors to impact on people and practice. We also need more journals dedicated to the work of Black, Brown and non-Western scholars that utilize decolonial structures and practices.

Breaking the cycle means rethinking not just what we do, but how and why we do it. It involves resisting exploitative systems and reimagining entirely new structures where knowledge is valued for its impact—not its marketability, number of citations or price paid for publishing. Rebuilding the system requires supporting scholar-led journals without APCs, empowering editorial collectives that redistribute power, and fostering decolonial research circles where publication is just one of many knowledge-sharing tools—demonstrating that ethical, inclusive, and non-exploitative systems of scholarship are possible.

In this paper, we draw on our collective experiences and reflections on how coloniality operates in academic publishing and research ecosystems. By sharing our personal experiences, we highlight that these challenges are not unique to us (Hana, Kyrah, Mazna) but are widely shared by other Brown and Black scholars. We conclude with four decolonial recommendations—a call to action for transforming how we produce, review, and value knowledge. It is our intention to continue to advocate for journals in community psychology and allied fields to commit to action.

3. Reimagine Peer Review as a Decolonial Practice

Decolonial work begins by naming violence in academic systems and dismantling the structures that sustain it, including peer review. This means shifting peer review from a gatekeeping mechanism to a practice rooted in ethical, political, and epistemological accountability. Journals can start by expanding their reviewer pools to include scholars with lived experience and expertise in marginalized and non-Western epistemologies. Editorial boards should provide guidance that explicitly values different forms of knowledge, such as (but not limited to) storytelling, collective voice, and non-traditional structure—especially when these choices reflect the author’s epistemological or cultural grounding. Reviewer training must address colonial legacies in citation and method and the harm caused by demanding conformity to dominant academic norms. Ultimately, peer review must become a space that supports and strengthens work committed to justice, rather than silencing it.

4. Center Epistemic Justice in Research and Training

We must expand what is considered legitimate knowledge by making space for voice, emotion, politics, and relational accountability. This requires journals to actively center decolonial frameworks and reform how qualitative research is assessed. Submissions grounded in lived experience, narrative, or community knowledge—particularly from Indigenous and Global South traditions (e.g., Maseti et al., 2026)—must not be judged by positivist or quantitative standards. For example, editorial policies should require methodological alignment between reviewers and submissions. At the same time, academic programs must teach methodological pluralism and

challenge false binaries between “rigorous” and “subjective.” Decolonial research demands depth, meaning, and contextual insight—not just generalizability.

5. Shift Editorial and Institutional Power through Structural Change

Inclusion without structural change reproduces epistemic containment. When the foundation is colonial, everything becomes a first-order change. We must dismantle the system and create a new one that serves the interests of all without prioritizing some groups. Editorial boards must examine which values they uphold and which knowledge they dismiss. Reviewer training must focus on unlearning harmful norms, such as the demand for neutrality and the tendency to critique work without considering its social and political context. Reviewers must know when to step aside. Departments and institutions must redefine scholarly value—rejecting metrics like journal rankings as any indicator of worth. They must value knowledge shared through community reports, workshops, podcasts, multilingual and collaborative writing, and honor the labor of staying rooted in community. Hiring and evaluation practices must uplift relational, justice-driven work.

6. Practice Accountability and Refusal in Our Own Work

A decolonial stance is not only critique—it is a commitment to creating different ways of being in community and in knowledge. This requires practicing accountability in our work, refusing to conform to harmful academic norms and actively building alternative structures for knowledge production and dissemination. We must write without permission, mentor without replicating institutional violence, and create publishing spaces grounded in collective care and accountability. Refusal of extractive publishing, of silencing, of epistemic containment, is a generative act.

Refusal alone is not enough, but we recognize that we still need to operate within the system for the time being. This requires demanding that universities redefine scholarly value at every level (e.g., Who receives tenure? Whose work is galvanized by the institution? Whose work is used to inform policy?). Academic institutions must:

- **Overhaul evaluation of faculty scholarship** to recognize and reward community-engaged work, collaborative writing, multilingual and non-traditional outputs like podcasts, community reports, and oral histories.
- **Redirect funding** toward projects rooted in land-based, relational, or community-led research, including those shared outside traditional academic venues.
- **Support community review** processes where scholarship is assessed not just by academics but by those directly impacted or involved.
- **Invest in alternative platforms** that are open-access, community-run, and multilingual, rejecting the constraints of corporate academic publishing.
- **Create academic roles** that honor long-term community relationships, traditional knowledges, and collective labor—not just individual productivity or prestige.

Accountability means asking when we have stayed silent, when we have reshaped our voices to gain acceptance, and when we have upheld the very systems we seek to dismantle. Decolonial

practice requires that we begin again—together—on different terms, with different structures, and in relationship with those beyond the academy. We must also build. Resistance is not where decoloniality ends but it is where it begins. We must reallocate resources into the systems we want to create. Are universities as we know it what they need to be for a decolonial way of living and being? We need to start thinking about whether universities are sites of knowledge and what their purpose will be for all of society.

We close with deliberate hope—hope grounded in collective action. It is not enough to recognize violence or agree with critique while upholding harmful systems. We must move from cognition to risk, from recognition to transformation. For scholars, this means refusing to contort our work to fit colonial norms. For editors and institutions, it means letting go of control and reading with humility. For all of us, it means staying with discomfort and refusing the convenience of silence. The goal is not to reform academic publishing. It is to build something else entirely—together.

6.1 Dear Diary, I Want to Break the Cycle and Build Something Better

I don't want to wake up one day and realize I've become the kind of senior academic I used to fear—fluent in the system, but no longer willing to question it. The kind who tells early-career scholars, "Just play the game now so you can change it later," even though later often fades into comfort and complicity.

I see how easy it is to get drawn in—to be rewarded for small compromises, to sit at decision-making tables while quietly upholding the very norms we once set out to challenge. But I also see cracks in the system—junior scholars refusing to conform, collectives rewriting the rules, editors making space for different voices. Change is happening, even if slowly.

I want to be part of that change. I want to write, mentor, and lead in ways that disrupt rather than reproduce harm. Every time I feel the pull to conform, I remind myself: survival is not the same as liberation. I'm learning that it's not just about refusing the system—it's about helping build another one. I may not have all the answers, but I know this: I didn't come this far just to survive. I came to make room—for myself and for those still coming.

The system may be slow to change, but the momentum is real—and growing. There is hope in the refusal, in the experiments, in the small wins. And now, more than ever, it's time to move from reflection to action. It's time to break the cycle—and begin building something better.

Decolonial publishing is not a checklist—it's a commitment to justice, complexity, and collective transformation. We envision a future where knowledge is co-created, where impact is measured by healing and connection, not citation counts.

We close with deliberate hope. Change is already happening—in refusals, in experiments, in small wins. Let us move from reflection to action. Let us build something better—together. We offer four decolonial recommendations as a call to action. But critique alone is not enough. We leave you with three questions for your diary entries:

- What if publishing centered relationality over prestige?
- What if accountability meant honoring communities, not just institutions?
- What if multiplicity and care were scholarly values?

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