A photograph of a group of people sitting on the ground outdoors under large trees. The scene is captured from a low angle, showing the legs and feet of people in the foreground. A semi-transparent white box with a thin black border is centered over the image, containing text. The background shows lush green foliage and a clear sky.

Beginning from the Inside Out

The Value of ~~Pilot Studies~~ Relational  
Grounding in Decolonial Research



## The value of pre-grounding

- Limited educational literature on Ju/'hoansi contexts,
- western anthropological framings dominating the literature,
- Drawing from broader Indigenous scholarship,
- Uncertainty as productive rather than failure.

What **pilot studies** are usually framed as :

- testing methods,
- checking feasibility,
- refining instruments,
- reducing risk before larger research.

Within decolonial and Indigenous research, a **pre-grounding, a relational grounding**, may do something far more significant than testing methods. It may become the space in which relationships, responsibilities, ethics, and ways of knowing begin to emerge.

# The pilot as relational groundwork

In Indigenous work, grounding becomes:

- spending time together,
- learning rhythms of daily life,
- conversations,
- flexibility,
- how research questions changed,
- how methods emerged through relation rather than prior design

**Relationality here can be understood as:**

- the condition for knowledge,
- accountability,
- trust,
- ethical responsiveness.



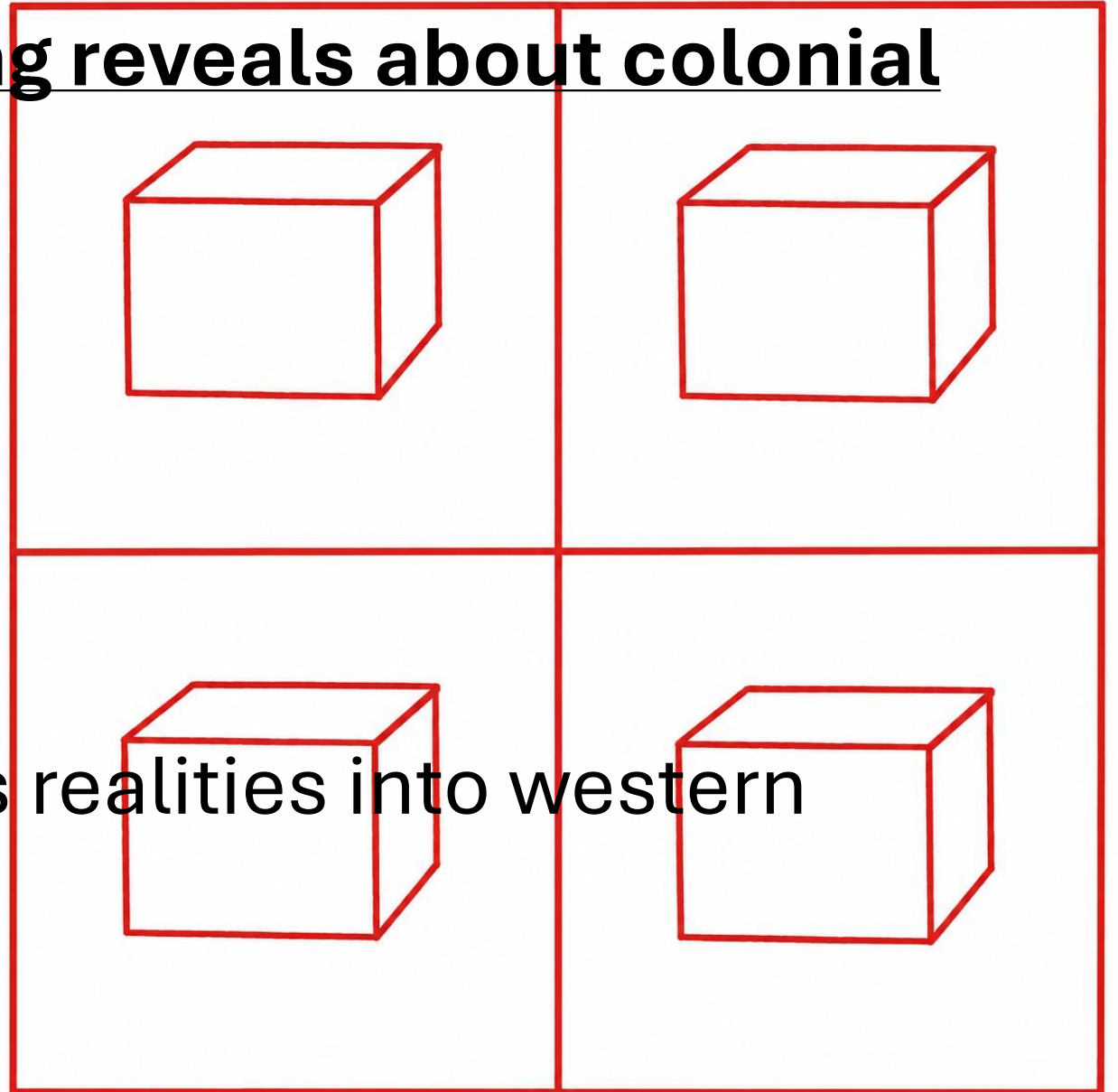
A high-angle photograph of two young children sitting on a sandy or dirt ground. They are both focused on playing with small, light-colored stones or pieces of clay scattered around them. The child on the left is wearing a light-colored, textured sweater and a floral patterned skirt. The child on the right is wearing a dark blue t-shirt and a floral patterned skirt. The background is a plain, light-colored surface, possibly sand or dirt.

With research emerging from and through relationships, it allows and requires:

- research to shifting daily,
- releasing the need to fit into neat methodological categories,
- methodological openness,
- moving away from extraction.

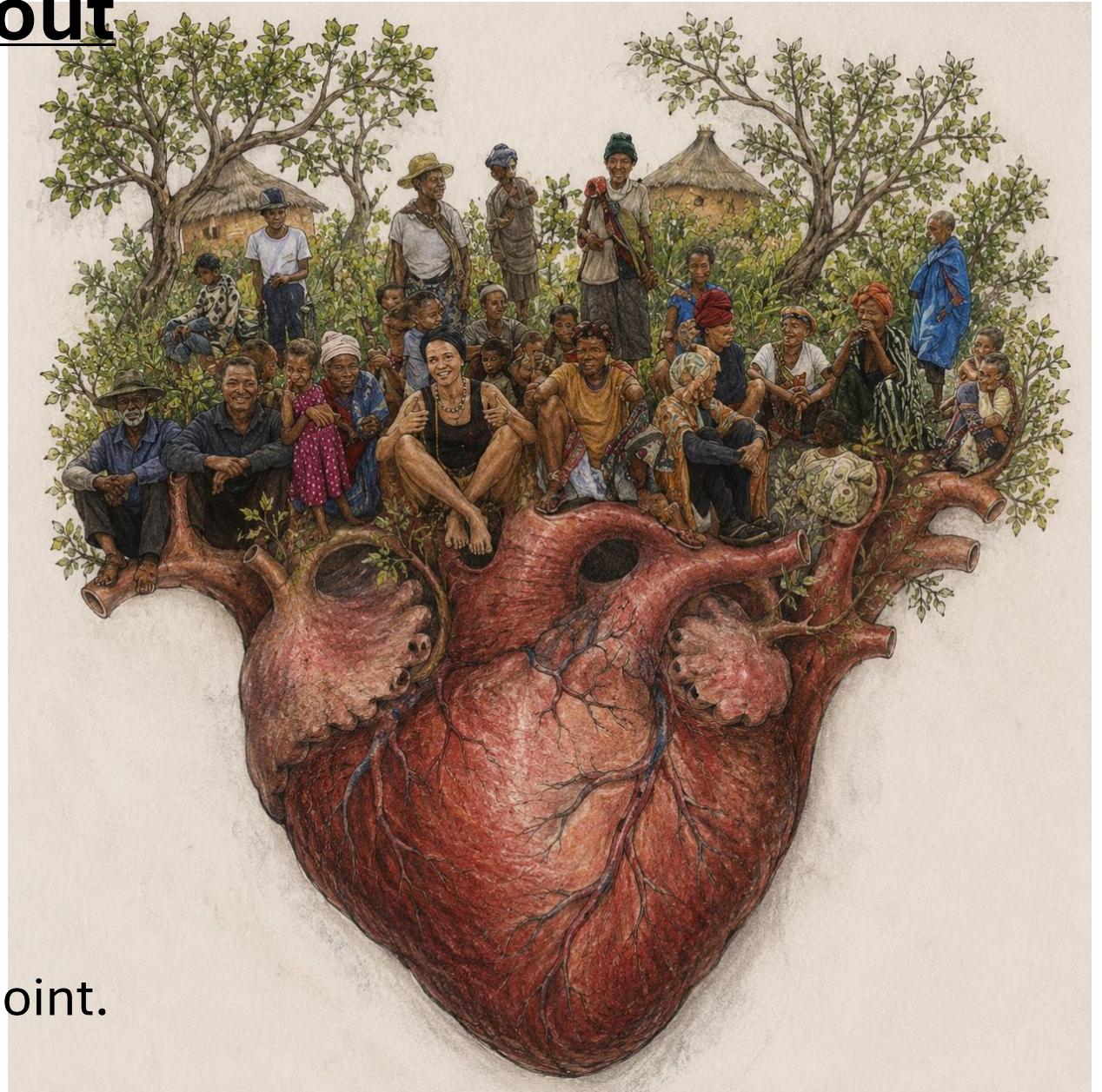
# What relational grounding reveals about colonial research logics

- outsider framing,
- categorisation,
- pre-designed methods,
- deficit assumptions,
- translation of Indigenous realities into western categories.



# Beginning from the **inside** out

- **relational accountability:**  
Indigenous people as co-researchers,
- **onto-epistemology:**  
knowledge emerging from community ontologies,
- **decolonial refusal:**  
research shaped internally rather than externally imposed,
- **community-led meaning-making:**  
refusing outsider framing as the starting point.





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