

Mutual Developments on Decolonial Interaction between Schools and Community

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University of Nairobi/University of Manchester Collaboration Decolonial Praxis in Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper has summarized work and achievements made in a number of collaborative conferences that treats decolonization as a process of undoing the multifaceted impacts of colonization and re-establishing strong contemporary Indigenous nations and institutions based on traditional values, philosophies, and knowledge. As an overview, the report in the paper posits that educational institutions must become the prime movers of the process, as the educational curriculum determines the kind of citizens it develops. A decolonized curriculum includes various types of knowledge, especially indigenous knowledge, and this is found not just from scholars but from practitioners in the communities. The paper demonstrates how the partners actively engaging actively in decolonial praxis, developing an interaction between communities and the school to enhance tapping of credible information usually ignored by scholars. The method used was through talks in schools, communities, activists and artists, poems, skits, songs and Interviews with Key Informants. Discussions, photographs, and video clips, and a traditional rite on a distinguished scholar are illustrative of the work. In all these interaction key findings are most of what is taught in schools and practised in our communities is corrupted version of our history, culture, spirituality that is leading to total loss of indigenous languages and Identity of former colonial states. Recommendations were made to scholars to engage in research to fight for visibility and acceptance of information obtained through orature, and acceptance of work written in local languages.

INTRODUCTION

Colonialism is the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial control over another country to exploit it economically with the state apparatus. The major types of colonialism are settler colonialism and internal colonialism. Settler colonialism has as its subtypes, such as territorial, juridical, exploitative, and plantation colonialism. Internal colonialism has educational, cultural, religious, linguistic, mental/epistemic, and economic domination of a people. While a country can confront and liberate itself from settler forms of colonialism, the internal aspect is crafted to metamorphose into an internal type, which is covert and given new terminologies. Spivak 2018, Rodney 2012, and Write et al. 2007 refer to the colonization of Africa as 'Epistemic Violence', which has silenced the colonial subjects of Africa in appropriating and replacing their education systems with Eurocentric ones. The process of liberating oneself from internal colonization is discussed in this paper as decolonization.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith defines decolonization as "a social and political process aimed at undoing the multifaceted impacts of the colonial project and re-establishing strong contemporary Indigenous nations and institutions based on traditional values, philosophies, and knowledge. For this to happen, decolonization must be a multi-faceted action that touches on politics, religion, art, and education in and of Africa. Muasya, J. defines decolonizing knowledge as the process of questioning, changing, and transforming imposed theories and interpretations brought about by colonial systems. Decolonizing Africa requires a reversal-epistemic restoration (Write et al., 2007), where education should aim to critically engage with and include African knowledge, both pre-colonial and post-colonial, in formal schooling while refusing to affix the label of inferiority to other systems of knowledge as has been the case until now.

Education in all societies informs all other institutions that run the affairs of the community. It can be regarded as the ministry of human resources for every nation. Every society that experienced colonization by Western

powers must continue to engage in the exercise of decolonizing the education sector for meaningful development. A colonized education system assists in propagating the bias in favor of the colonizer's narrative in all subjects, language, history, culture, geography, religion, science, art, creativity, and even physical appearance and color. This calls for the involvement of all stakeholders, hence the requirement to connect the community and the school to decolonize education, starting with the decolonization of the school curriculum.

The process of colonization persists through Eurocentric education. As shown in a study by Njoki, W. (2018), there is no trace of African Indigenous knowledge at any level of education. She commented on the pervasive nature of Eurocentric education in Africa, highlighting how it often overlooks indigenous knowledge and perspectives, thus perpetuating a form of intellectual colonialism. A colonized education system churns out mentally colonized political leaders, indoctrinated religious leaders, skewed economic planners, culturally bankrupt citizens, and a populace that lacks any trace of linguistic roots, hence short of identity. Raewyn Connell's critique of the "global knowledge economy" and her advocacy for the recognition of Southern theory have profound implications for decolonial education. Her book, *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science* (2007), calls for a rethinking of the dominance of Northern epistemologies and promotes the inclusion of diverse knowledge systems in educational discourse.

Arturo Escobar's exploration of relational ontologies and the politics of place offers valuable insights for decolonial education. In his book, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (2018), Escobar challenges the dominance of Western-centric development models and promotes alternative ways of knowing and being.

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's work on the decolonial turn in African higher education has been pivotal in rethinking educational structures and curricula. His book, *"Decolonizing the University: Knowledge Systems and Disciplines in Africa"* (2016), addresses the need for a thorough decolonization of higher education institutions to better serve African societies.

An overview of Decolonization Praxis

Success in decolonizing education will have to start from top to bottom in the realm of education. The same must start in higher education to decolonize the minds of the graduates who are dispatched to teach at the lower levels of education. In the United States of America, students demanded African content in their syllabi, under the movement 'Why is my lecturer white? Students in higher education are known to have started powerful activism for the decolonization of education, such as 'Rhodes Must Fall' in 2015 in Zimbabwe. In Kenya, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1984) and colleagues called for the scrapping of English in the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi, supported by students. However, as Anver Versi in *New African* put it, 'for a long time, Ngugi was a lone voice howling against the wind. Now, people like Edward Said and others have joined in the war against cultural imperialism "Let battle commence"' (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 2022).

Decolonizing education will be a success when led by more Africans themselves. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *"Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples"* is a cornerstone of contemporary indigenous studies. It emphasizes that ethical, inclusive, and decolonizing research practices will reshape the field and influence scholars and practitioners worldwide. The principles and insights offered by Smith are essential in our collective efforts to create more equitable and just research practices that honor and respect indigenous knowledge systems. An analysis of faculty experiences tackling global knowledge asymmetries by Liisa et al. (2023) examining the decolonization of higher education in Africa revealed that the debate on defining 'decolonization' is dominated by the Global North and South Africa, as well as their experiences with curriculum reform. In a study that focused on the experiences of political scientists in Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, which share the same Anglophone political science traditions, recommendations were made to increase local content and perspectives in their teaching, as promoted in the official strategies of the universities.

The academic decolonization debate appeared overambitious in the political context of the countries represented. In the same study, university bureaucracies were slow to respond to proposed curriculum changes, and new programs were approved if there was a market-based demand for them, while international programs

tended to be approved faster. The political economy of higher education plays a role in dependency on foreign funding, limited national resources to conduct research and produce publications vis-à-vis international competition, and national quality assurance standards appear to be the most critical constraints for decolonizing the curriculum.

As stated earlier, the decolonization of education must address a wide spectrum. Nelson Maldonado-Torres' contributions to decolonial theory, particularly his concept of the "coloniality of being," have profound implications for education. His work, "Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity" (2008), critiques the dehumanizing aspects of coloniality and advocates for an ethics of liberation in educational praxis. In the linguistic praxis, several African scholars insist on the importance of reforming African education in the use of local languages as languages of instruction. Evidence shows that learning in foreign languages prevents an intellectual dislocation that negatively affects identity, creativity, and works on learners (Alapo L.2023). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's advocacy for the use of native languages in education is a critical component of decolonial theory. His influential work, "Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature" (1986), argues for the importance of linguistic decolonization and its role in empowering marginalized communities. Mazrui (1986) had wondered if there was any known country that became economically developed while using a borrowed language for its discourse and development.

The call for the use of local languages in education is not an indication of discarding foreign languages. UNESCO (2004) refers to education in foreign languages by African countries as Linguistic Imperialism. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1989) emphasized the importance of retaining mother tongue while adding other languages as 'language of power'. It goes without saying that if your African languages are not worth teaching, hierarchically, you are inferior to the languages of power

Benson (2004), in a background paper published by a UNESCO initiative, argued for formal biliteracy for minority children who have to experience education in a language other than their mother tongue. She referred to the ease with which bilingual children can translate concepts into other languages, which is better than memorization. Cummings (1979) showed that children find it easier to learn a second language only after mastering their own first language or mother tongue. This is relevant because most African children, at the age when they begin formal education, are still struggling to gain mastery of their own first language or mother tongue. Olulwe (2016), in a set of videos, demonstrated how the mother tongue is the preferred language of instruction. Olulwe argues that certain local experiences have no equivalent translation into English; hence, learning in a foreign language will be incomplete, foreign to learners, and not useful for knowledge creation. Chumbow 2009 and Adebisi (2016) in a randomized control pilot project in Kenya carried out by Piper et al. (2016), sought to provide qualitative evidence found in the medium-scale implementation of mother tongue education in Kenya. Recommendations were that similar experiments be carried out on a larger scale and that corresponding implementation challenges to be addressed by the government agencies concerned.

Other subjects, such as history, contain narratives of Europeans who 'discovered' lakes, mountains, sources of rivers, and the Nile, and others named them after their reigning monarchs and significant characters in their homelands. Some of those landmarks still retain their names despite the pain and suffering inflicted by the agents of colonialists on these countries of their former subjects. As an example, Lake Victoria, Aberdare Ranges, Thompson's Falls, and the like should appear in history for references, but not as current names of the same physical marks in Kenya in a decolonized history book.

The history of the decolonized education system should reveal the kind of interactions between Africans and the colonial agents that led to the perception of the very clever white versus the primitive African in their own country. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1978) cites many instances of the stereotyping of Africans verbalized by whites that became internalized by the subjects in the way they view themselves. The community has the kind of information that may be recorded and used in the curriculum. The Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) introduced in the Kenyan education system contains the goal to achieve this, where pupils are tasked to get information from the community and report the same to earn some credit.

The custodians of a rich indigenous understanding of local languages are the common people who may not

know much of the colonial languages but are dismissed as illiterate by colonial standards. They must be involved if the school needs to tap into the useful knowledge they possess in the decolonization of the language curriculum in education. Common people are also a source of important histories of their communities that would be useful in correcting the misconceptions and biases portrayed in foreign languages. Such interaction arouses interest in the community and may contribute to the growth of a reading culture, which would be of much benefit to the country in decolonizing praxis.

The photograph below was an interview session with the only female field marshal, Muthoni wa Kirima, in the Mau Mau war of liberation in Kenya. Muthoni remained in the forest for ten years, engaged in guerrilla war against the settler colonists in Kenya from 1953 to 1964. Her narration of the history of Kenya should be part of the history in the Kenyan education curriculum. Such narratives would give the students a chance to critique the content composed by third parties, including those written by foreign authors, over their perception of Africans.



Photo 01: Interview with Field Marshal Muthoni Kirima by a scholar, an Activist, and members of Racial Justice Network (RJN) in Kenya, 31 July 2022.

Connecting the School and Community in Knowledge Sharing.

Universities have the autonomy to develop curricula and adjust appropriate pedagogy to achieve the goal of decolonization. Decolonizing education in higher education starts with teacher training in higher education, which would prepare the teachers to guide the learners on getting credible information. The syllabi should be grounded in the local environment in all subjects. As an example, decolonizing the Geography Syllabus entails an emphasis on understanding the local environment and the ecosystem, which has a direct impact on the local communities. Although there ought to be an international awareness, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1984) put it, 'Knowledge starts from here to there, there to here in a dialogical progression to mutual illumination', meaning that priority ought to be given to local, then to others, and from others to locals, not the reverse.

Decolonizing of religious education curriculum would entail reforming the image of the white Jesus who came to save us from the imminent fire in hell. The fact that the Bible has had 1001 translations for purposes of editing content that carries different meanings to different communities, as per the racist intent, should be put in the

open. Muasya, J. (2020) says decolonizing Religious Education involves challenging religious systems and structures imposed by colonial masters, such as using religion as a tool of ‘racism’, apartheid, indoctrination, evangelization, and exploitation. As a subject taught in Kenyan schools, religious education should acknowledge and respect the diversity of African beliefs and culture and therefore become a powerful tool for promoting sustainable development in Africa. African Spiritualism has been labeled as superstition, demonic, and primitive, leaving a confused Christian socialized to believe in saints and the Holy Spirit believe by faith, but witness strange phenomena of local thieves ‘arrested’ by bees and guided to return their loot to the owner while in a trance.

Decolonization of subjects like Biology should encourage recognition of African Knowledge, such as foods, herbs, and their medicinal values, and incorporate local names, branding, and patenting of indigenous plants as an African knowledge contribution. The often-dismissed traditional medicine men are useful sources of knowledge on products that cost hundreds of dollars in research from scratch, while the information is available.

Research reveals that a struggle to decolonize the curriculum can shed light on a variety of challenges inherent in decolonization. A collaboration between the West and Africa in developing relevant content would enhance understanding and reduce the possibility of biased literature. It will require acceptance of other methods of acquiring information as credible. References have been made to the critical political economy analysis of racial inequalities that African scholars had advanced earlier on, and more recently to the use of participatory methods in the research to make it relevant to the local populace.

The previous workshops discussed pertinent issues regarding the decolonization of education.

The collaboration partners jointly visited Alliance Girls High School for a session on decolonizing the school curriculum under the theme ‘Remember, Resist, Repair’. At the end of the interaction, there were unanimous calls to decolonize history and introduce vernacular as subjects being offered.



Photo 02: Decolonial discussion at Alliance Girls High School. (Source: DEF Gallery, UoN)

The students were later invited to the ongoing decolonization symposium at the University of Nairobi. They participated in giving their views on the subject, which included a decolonization of terminologies in Biology and an overhaul of all subjects in the curriculum.



Photo 03: Alliance Girls attending Decolonial Symposium at UoN.

By the time Alliance girls came to participate, they had composed a song and a poem calling for the decolonization of education, which motivated the collaborating team in their quest to connect the school and the community.

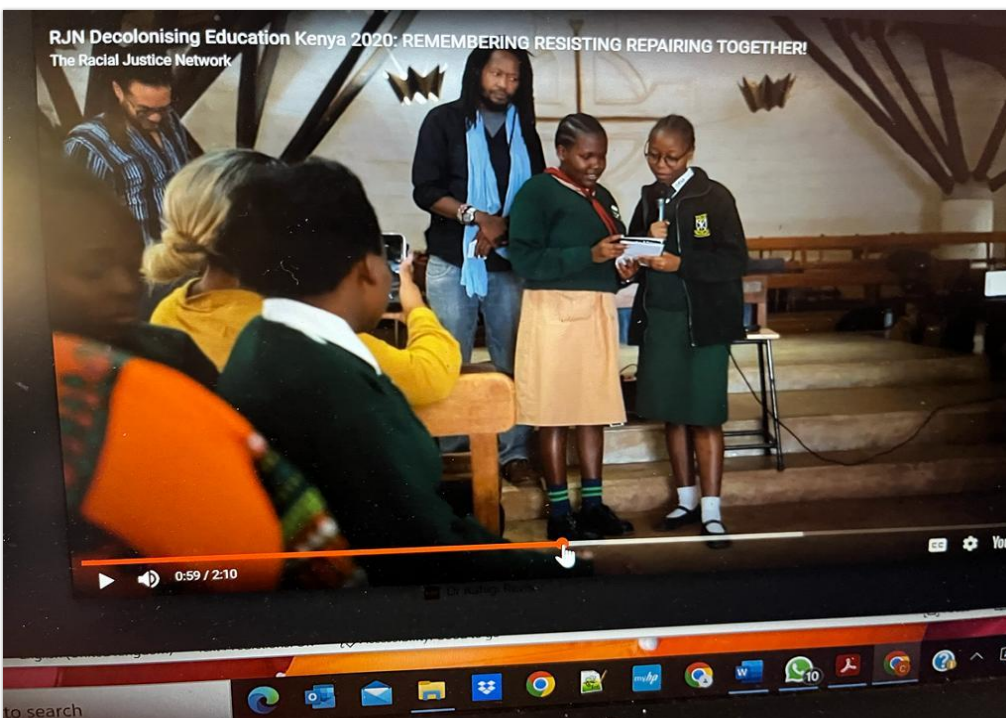


Photo 04: Alliance Girls High School students presenting at UoN at the Decolonizing Education Symposium.

Artivists and Activists were engaged at PAWA 54 by the combined team of collaborators. It was observed that numerous research findings and recommendations were stored in government offices, and legislators never bothered to refer to them while legislating laws and policies. With informed activists, it will be possible to make the public and those responsible aware. The role of the activists was emphasized as activating for the implementation of Research recommendations on decolonization by legislators, and corresponding policies by the ministries concerned.



Photo 05: A Collaborating team of Academia, Artist, and Activists discussing Decolonisation of Education at PAWA 254, Nairobi

In October 2023, three lecturers from DEF and Ndungi Githuku (the Artist) attended a 3-week excursion with the lead guest, Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o. The conference involved the Universities of Leeds, Sheffield, and Manchester, and for each visit, there were two sessions, with the community and another with academia. The theme of the conference was 'normalized abnormalities,' which is conceptualized as the promotion of internalized colonial legacies and requires decolonizing. In all the meetings held, there was community and academia, and emphasis was put on the importance of preserving culture, in names, language, and knowledge, so that the formerly colonized communities do not lose their identity. It is time the rest of the world knows Africans and other racialized minorities were knowledge producers, not just consumers. In demonstrating respect for culture and traditions in academia, a traditional ceremony was held to recognize Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o as an elder in his indigenous community. The fact that the community would welcome connecting with the school was evident in Sheffield, where the people of color and minorities turned out in large numbers to participate in a ceremony that made Ngugi wa Thiong'o an African elder.



Photo 06: The Sheffield community meeting with RJN, University Scholars in a traditional ceremony to honor Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o as an elder

The other meeting between delegates and Sheffield academia resulted in a fruitful discussion on normalized abnormalities. The need for continued collaboration to contribute to the agenda was expressed.



Photo 07: Scholars, RJN and community meet Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o at Sheffield University.

The other visit at the University of Leeds, where the international delegates accompanied Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in memory of his days as a student at the University. The reception by the University community was memorable.



Photo 08: The Leeds University community meets Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o as alumni of the University of Leeds.

The delegates later met the Leeds community in Leeds City, and a discussion on the preservation of the indigenous language was held.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aCOu42wwlUWTj3CBpkg4wANGuHPe3_lt/view?usp=drive_link

Video: 01. Meeting of Academia and Community in Leeds

As a practice to achieve the goals of the conference, a visit to the ordinary community was held, and a call for uniting to decolonize by realizing the normalized abnormalities was made.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dUTfbX278cAOcyQD6kRUxzSFVcLZGoGm/view?usp=drive_link

Video: 02. Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, UoN, Kenyan Artist, RJN, meets Leeds Kenyan Community in Leeds.

The same model was applied in Manchester, where community and academia met the delegation and held talks in the cocktail method, with songs, speeches, and performances, all of which blended and produced intended results.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gFo02Hs9c2qS89oK1ngOyJt_PrhlZanB/view?usp=drive_link

Video: 03. The UoN academia, Kenyan Artist, Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, RJN, and the University of Manchester community and guests attend the Lewis Memorial

In conclusion, the paper has highlighted the key areas. The symposium emphasized the need to address and counteract the lingering colonial influences in the current educational curriculum; hence, reviewing of education curriculum must continue to eliminate colonial legacies in former colonies. The Spirit and Philosophy of Ubuntu can be manifested through advocacy to incorporate the African philosophy, which emphasizes community, sharing, and mutual respect, into education. Calls for the rectification of biased, Eurocentric histories and the inclusion of authentic African perspectives were registered. The importance of training teachers in decolonial methodologies to foster transformative education was highlighted. Calls were made in the various forums for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and practices in the educational curriculum, and promotion and preservation of African cultures and languages within educational frameworks. There was remarkable excitement and positive response from communities, exemplified by the participation of people of colour and minorities in events like the one honouring Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Sheffield, and Alliance Girls High School, and PAWA 254 in Kenya

Going forward, to pursue the decolonization of education, the school and the community need to be involved for reasons discussed earlier in this paper. Continued collaboration is illustrated by the productive discussions between delegates and Sheffield academia on the theme of 'normalized abnormalities and the expressed need for ongoing collaboration to advance the decolonization agenda. This will be a good and decolonized way of developing indigenous knowledge production that is relevant to us. A commitment was made to continue building international solidarity between activists, artists, and scholars in Kenya and their UK counterparts.

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