

## Editorial

# Decolonization must be global

Dag Herbjørnsrud

Dag Herbjørnsrud is the editor of the special issue of *Cosmopolis* on “Decolonizing the Academy”. He is a global historian of ideas and a non-fiction author. He has published in particular “Beyond decolonizing: global intellectual history and reconstruction of a comparative method”, in [Global Intellectual History](#), 2019), articles on the philosophy of Mesoamerica (Nahua/Maya), Kemet (Egypt), and India (atheism, Carvaka/Lokayata) for the American Philosophical Association (APA). He is also the founder of the Senter for global og komparativ idéhistorie/Center for Global and Comparative History of Ideas ([SGOKI](#)).

*The articles in this special issue of Cosmopolis, dedicated to the theme of “Decolonizing the Academy”, have been written by academics and writers on the four continents of Asia, Africa, Europe, and Turtle Island (the name of the land also known as “America” used by the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), the People of the Longhouse).*

*We would like to thank Julia Masnik at the Watkins/Loomis Agency for enabling us to reprint the Ngūgĩ text from 1986. And we would like to thank Barbara Caldwell, Ngūgĩ’s senior editor and assistant, for making it possible for us to publish his new text from December 2020. Finally, I would like to thank Paul Ghils, the editor-in-chief, for entrusting me with the guest-editorship of this special issue of Cosmopolis.*

In this special issue it is our great honor to present a new and original text by the Distinguished Professor and long-time candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature, Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o (b. 1938). This exclusive text, “Decolonization must be Global,” was sent to us by Ngūgĩ’s editor on December 8, 2020 and is published below. This new statement by Ngūgĩ can be read in the context of the excerpts we have taken from the introduction to his modern classic, *Decolonising the Mind. The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), a book discussed and referred to in several of the texts in this issue. These are the words of Ngūgĩ in December 2020, under the heading “Decolonization must be Global”:

*« I welcome this issue on decolonizing the academy. Colonization, with all its interlinked economic, political, cultural and even psychic dimensions, has been central to the making of the Modern world. It was the new colonies in the West that fueled Atlantic slave trade, slavery and racism, and all these fed capitalism’s greed. The major cities of Europe were built by colonialism and slavery. Three of the major nuclear powers today were also major players in enslavement and colonization.*

*Colonialism was many things: Military conquest; social engineering; and production of knowledge. Many of the colonized were once tortured in university laboratories to test out new medicines. Ideas and images were part of the ideological defense of colonial ventures. All over the West today still stand monuments and other images to the glory of those who enslaved and colonized. Indeed, many of the most venerated Universities in the West were built with or benefited from monies from colonialism and slavery.*

*Colonization is colonizer and colonized. So, decolonization at the Economic, Political, Cultural and Psychic levels has to involve both the colonizer and the colonized. The*

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*Western academies cannot stand aloof. When I released my book, Decolonizing the Mind, in 1986, I never would have dreamed that so many would be taking up the issue.*

*And I am glad the debates on decolonization continue. I welcome the tide. Decolonization has to be global. The consequences of colonialism, particularly the colony of the mind, must be eradicated globally. »*

There is so much to say and unpack when it comes to these words of Ngũgĩ's at the end of 2020, and I hope others will do so in the years to follow. At the very least, we can say that we draw inspiration from his emphasis on the idea that "decolonization has to be global." This reminds us of his canonical book, published some 35 years ago, and the conclusion to his global Introduction, "Towards the Universal Language of Struggle":

*"The theme of this book is simple. It is taken from a poem by the Guyanese poet Martin Carter in which he sees ordinary men and women hungering and living in rooms without lights; all those men and women in South Africa, Namibia, Kenya, Zaire, Ivory Coast, El Salvador, Chile, Philippines, South Korea, Indonesia, Grenada, Fanon's 'Wretched of the Earth', who have declared loud and clear that they do not sleep to dream, 'but dream to change the world'.*

*I hope that some of the issues in this book will find echoes in your hearts."*

Clearly, Ngũgĩ's words and the issues he raised echoed in hearts around the world. In New Zealand, the Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith published the groundbreaking book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999). For justice does not only encompass the struggle for equal rights in the economic and political realms. It also includes a more just world at the "cultural and psychic levels", as Ngũgĩ points out.

It also includes the structure of knowledge – in the universities and their epistemologies. Hence this issue on "Decolonizing the Academy."

Eurocentric and colonial narratives will not simply disappear – certainly not within the humanities and social sciences, or in the structures of Artificial Intelligence (AI) – without creating an awareness of the knowledge systems that have been destroyed or suppressed since the early 16th century. Such exploitation of other knowledge systems is a process that sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos has termed "epistemicide," leading to "cognitive injustice." After all, for 500 years the so-called "modern world" has been built on what the late sociologist Aníbal Quijano (Peru) called a "coloniality of power", based on the three systems of hierarchies, knowledge, and culture.

"Can the subaltern speak?" asked Professor Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her famous 1988 essay. When it comes to academic systems influenced by colonial logic and narratives, the answer still, often, seems to be "no." The subalterns, the indigenous, and the wretched of the earth are not being centered or allowed to speak on their own behalf, either as acting persons or as persons of knowledge. And they are not the only ones: According to Kant's worldview, only Europeans, practically speaking only white men, could think. Hegel, meanwhile, denigrated Africa and Africans, making only Europeans an end-point of his Universal History.

But Black History Matters – just as much as Black Lives Matter. Such a connection was also emphasized more than a quarter of a millennium ago by the intellectual freedom fighter Toussaint L'Ouverture (1743–1803), leader of the successful Haitian Revolution. In his July 1792 letter to French colonizers, arguing that it was against "natural right" for whites to enslave blacks on sugar plantations, L'Ouverture declared: "Yes, gentlemen, we are free like you, and it is only by your avarice and our ignorance that anyone is still held in

slavery up to this day." Hence: "For too long have we borne your chains without thinking of shaking them off (...)" In his view, a physical revolution could not take place without an intellectual liberation. Thus, L'Ouverture concluded his first public proclamation on August 29, 1793, as follows: "Equality cannot exist without liberty. And for liberty to exist, we must have unity."

L'Ouverture may be considered a subaltern voice, one among many. There are so many more. It is a loss to us all that, for example, the great literary, legal and philosophical texts of ancient Kemet (Egypt), written in hieratic cursive on papyrus 2,000 to 1,000 years before the Common Era, are no longer as well known as the later Greek texts. And the list goes on. The knowledge systems and texts from Asia, Africa, Oceania and the Americas – alongside the multicultural and complex history of Europe – these are the "hidden figures" of the academy, waiting to be discovered and reinstated in our intellectual Global Knowledge Canon. After all, this was often a position non-European voices had before the "enlightened racism" of the 18th century.

Decolonizing the academy, this intellectual struggle against epistemological colonization, will take time. And it is arduous. As Nobel laureate Toni Morrison stated in her 1975 speech at Portland State University:

*"It's important, therefore, to know who the real enemy is, and to know the function, the very serious function of racism, which is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and so you spend 20 years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says that you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says that you have no kingdoms and so you dredge that up. None of that is necessary. There will always be one more thing."*

These might be some of the goals of decolonizing the academy: to stop the distraction. To cure epistemicide. To reconstruct knowledge systems. To promote more balanced narratives, from the past and the present. To ensure that there is no "one thing left" to keep any of us from doing our work. In this case, decolonization must be global.

Fittingly, the recent wave of decolonization, in addition to the one originally sparked by Kikuyu language user Ngũgĩ from central Kenya, also originated in Africa: on March 9, 2015, a lone student at Cape Town University in South Africa confronted the statue glorifying the colonizer Cecil Rhodes on campus and started the #RhodesMustFall campaign.

After a month of student protests, the Cape Town University administration conceded to the student demands: the statue of Cecil Rhodes, one of the "architects of apartheid," was removed from campus. In 2021, it will be decided whether the University of Oxford will also stop honoring Rhodes – or whether the university will continue to erect "monuments and other images to the glory of those who enslaved and colonized." Because symbols matter.

In November 2020, Dan Hicks, Professor of Contemporary Archeology at the University of Oxford, published *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*, in which he argues for the urgent return of colonial looted art from British and European museums. Or as Hicks states in the first chapter:

*"The point of departure for this book is the idea that, for as long as they continue to display sacred and royal objects looted during colonial massacres, they will remain the very inverse of all this: hundreds of monuments to the violent propaganda of western superiority above African civilisations erected in the*

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*name of 'race science', littered across Europe and North America like war memorials to gain rather than to loss, devices for the construction of the Global South as backward, institutions complicit in a prolongation of extreme violence and cultural destruction, indexes of mass atrocity and iconoclasm and ongoing degradation, legacies of when the ideology of cultural evolution, which was an ideology of white supremacy, used the museum as a tool for the production of alterity: tools still operating, hiding in plain sight. And so this is a book about sovereignty and violence, about how museums were co-opted into the nascent project of proto-fascism through the looting of African sovereignty, and about how museums can resist that racist legacy today."*

This is the colonial legacy, at the heart of "the British Empire". Today, we live in a so-called globalized world, but we sometimes seem worlds apart when it comes to understanding how this world came about. Or as the infamous Samuel P. Huntington stated, in a moment of remarkable candor: "The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion [...] but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do."

While the last sentence isn't strictly true, the quote also brings us back to the following question: What to do about the Colonized Academy of today?

One source of inspiration could be the "Ain't I a Woman" speech given by African American abolitionist Sojourner Truth (1797–1883) at the Women's Convention in Ohio on May 29, 1851. She demanded admission into the feminist movement as a black woman, propagating an early idea of what, almost a century and a half later, Kimberle Crenshaw termed "intersectionality": "*You need not be afraid to give us our rights for fear we will take too much, – for we can't take more than our pint'll hold.*"

This is what decolonizing might be said to be all about: there is no danger in giving people their rights back. Knowledge is a common good. Similarly, in her essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1982), the writer Audre Lorde (1934–1992) criticized a white "racist feminism" that excluded black working-class women and lesbian intellectuals of color. She wrote:

*"(...) survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause **with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.**"*

How, then, can we bring about genuine change? By making common cause with the ones identified as being outside the structures – so that we all may flourish? At the very least, we should abandon exclusionary, patriarchal, and supremacist ideologies. Real change, in Lorde's words, involves ceasing to define the master's house, for example the colonial parts of the academy, as one's "only source of support." We should strive for knowledge, not power. Truthfulness, not prestige. Or as Ngũgĩ writes in the text above, in December 2020: "The consequences of colonialism, especially the colony of the mind, must be eradicated worldwide."

The colony of the mind, the prison for our minds, is more difficult to resist than the colony of a state. Because the colonization of the mind is something that one cannot see, hear, or touch. But true and lasting change has to start in the mind. One cannot, in the words of L'Ouverture, free oneself from chains "without thinking of shaking them off." The bondage of the colonial narratives in education makes "emancipating mental slavery"

necessary, as Christopher Stuart Taylor argued. Still, such an eradication does not seem feasible. That is precisely why we should try.

The texts in this issue of *Cosmopolis* analyze and elaborate on questions such as those mentioned above:

In his article "What Does It Mean, Decolonize Philosophy? Using Examples from Hume Scholarship," Peter Park presents examples of decolonizing techniques as used by critical philosophers of race, including counter-narratives, subaltern perspectives, and the transgression of canons. Park examines the decolonial approach of the Nigerian-born philosopher Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (1963–2007), showing the coherence between David Hume's racism and his theory of human nature, especially his theory of mind.

In "Decolonization as 'golden repair' (*kintsugi*): powdered gold strengthening the academy" Minna Salami, argues that decolonizing the mind is a bit like Japanese *kintsugi*, "golden repair": the art of repairing a broken glass object with powdered gold. Decolonizing means using powdered gold not only to heal the mind, but also to transform trauma into strength. She also argues that we need to return to talking directly about propaganda and brainwashing, as well as "epistemic violence." Words matter.

Another perspective comes from Anh-Susann Phi Tam. Her paper "Beyond Decolonising the Academy: Anti-Capitalist Politics and the Coloniality of Labor" problematizes an overemphasis on epistemology and representation, which can downplay capitalism's global racial control over labor on which the structures of coloniality are based. Tam's work draws on original research into the "Rhodes Must Fall" and "Fees Must Fall" movements in South Africa and observations around the Decolonise the Curriculum campaigns in British higher education.

In "The Transformative Experience of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o at the Kamĩĩĩthũ Community," Bruno Ribeiro Oliveira explores the contact between Ngũgĩ and the working class people in the village of Kamĩĩĩthũ, Kenya, in the mid-1970s. This experience made Ngũgĩ prioritize the Kikuyua language and begin the decolonizing the mind project. Oliveira argues that Ngũgĩ and the local community did collective decolonial research that emancipates the participants and enhances our common epistemologies.

In "Decolonizing the Mind and Deconstructing the Colonial Library: The Quest for New Normative Paradigmatic Shifts in Postcolonial Francophone Africa" Samba Diop analyzes the texts *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) by Ngũgĩ and *The Invention of Africa* (1988) by the Congolese scholar V.Y. Mudimbe. Diop asks: Must Africans use African languages instead of European languages, or both? He argues that postcolonial Africa is in search of new paradigms to fully decolonize the academy, and the paper aims to give inputs to an interdisciplinary critical and analytical architecture.

The interdisciplinary paper "Comment décoloniser la recherche sur la migration africaine? Quelques idées" is written by Roberto Beneduce, Lisa Damon, Paolo Gaibazzi, Johannes Machinya, and Katharina Monz. They attended a workshop, organized by Point Sud, in Bamako, Mali, in October 2019, and ended up rethinking their perspective on migration from and within the African continent. They argue that researchers need to reassess the relationship with so-called "informants", who should instead be assigned the status of *interlocutors*. To decolonize means to give the primary sources agency. The authors argue that researchers must engage in the dissemination of the knowledge produced, especially by returning to the communities where this knowledge was conceived.

Aliya Kuzhabekova's article "Returning scholars in Kazakhstan and their role in neocolonial oppression in academia" uses a decolonial frame to analyze the role of

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native intellectuals in the reproduction of colonial structures in Kazakhstan's higher education. After reviewing the role of local intellectuals in the process of epistemic colonization during Russian rule, she looks at scholars who received their PhDs abroad and who have returned to Kazakhstan to work in higher education.

Nils Andersson describes the unique elements of European and white supremacy in his article "À quand la désaliénation du colonisateur?". He argues that the formerly colonized peoples and countries are not the only ones that need to rebuild after the colonial era: the same is true for Europeans and those with "white privilege". To deny the past, to be unconscious, is dangerous in today's world. Without historical honesty and consciousness, there can be no decolonization of the universities, Andersson concludes.

And lastly, in "Bangabandhu, nationalism and internationalism: lessons for our times from a novel post-Bakhtin and post-Badiou dynamic theory of polyphonic mass movements" Haidar A. Khan covers post-colonial Bangladesh and the role of the new state's first president, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

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*\* PS: Since the literal translation of "wa" in the name Ngūgĩ' wa Thiong'o literally means "Ngūgĩ, son of Thiong'o", Ngūgĩ is the appropriate way to refer to him in the following references.*