



Introduction

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Decolonizing the Spirit signifies two related epistemological and political practices simultaneously. It stands for the relationship between colonialism, oppression and racial violence, and the human aspirations, higher consciousness, and connection to the mysterious and the universal of the colonized, racialized, and oppressed. While the term and rhetoric of *spirit* suggests notions of religion and faith, the questions, as well as acts and attempts at resolution, articulated in *Decolonizing the Spirit*, query myriad informal iterations of spiritual life and understanding. The heart of *Decolonizing the Spirit* is the idea that the spirit cannot be colonized. Certainly, the spirit can go into hibernation for its own protection; however, we posit that a people's spirituality re-emerges at appropriate, safe, and growth times

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during and after colonization. While imperial projects, domination, and racial violence have aimed to break and destroy the spirit, the spirituality of colonial subjects not only has survived but it has been re-activated across national borders to claim social justice and equality for those whose lands were stolen and their bodies murdered and wounded.

Decolonizing the Spirit also captures a myriad of contemporary ‘decolonizing’ intellectual and political activities especially intense in North American academies as intellectuals, activists, and communities identify, disrupt, and dismantle material and symbolic structures extending and supporting violence against racialized and Indigenous peoples after the formal disintegration of empires. The essays included in this collection enact these projects, albeit differently, from diverse standpoints in Africa, Asia, and South and North America. These individual enactments, however, seek to reach others in a shared space. That space was first forged by women, especially Black academic women of African descent whose activism over a decade ago created a conference called ‘Decolonizing the Spirit’ at the University of Toronto in Toronto, Canada. Over the years, Indigenous in North America, Latina, Black Canadian, African American, Caribbean diaspora, Southeast Asian, and White women, men and non-binary people have joined this conversation about decolonization and the spirit. Questions pertaining to resistance, political alliances, togetherness, and difference centered the debates, showcasing the political power of knowledge exchanges blessed with love, respect, and spiritual mutuality amid cultural and historical difference.

The political and intellectual collaborations initiated at the conference over the years have opened important spaces and critical conversations about the Euro-centric and neoliberal nature of scientific research, knowledge production, and teaching. Questions about the role of these colonizing practices in dividing individuals and communities, normalizing land theft, extraction of natural resources, and related immigration policies, and justifying state violence against differently racialized, gendered, and sexed bodies have anchored our decolonization conversations over the years. Yet explicit analytical frameworks regarding spirituality seem to have alluded us, leaving a gap in the decolonization literature.

This book addresses the gap, offering multiple points of entry to perceive the relationship between (de)colonization and spirituality locally and globally. The authors whose voices grace the collection are not necessarily in agreement about the various polemics of decolonization or the

spirit. Rather, the chapters share unique spiritual views and perform decolonization differently through multiple epistemologies and fields of practice. Together, the chapters illuminate spiritual and political resurgences among many communities across the world. The Indigenous communities of North and South America, Africa, and Asia are revisiting their ways of knowing and insisting that their knowledges be honored and included in public education and schooling in meaningful ways. They have indicated in more ways than one that they will not be idle any more. This reawakening is not unique to Indigenous peoples. Rather, resurgence or political and cultural energies evident in communities around the globe beg the question about the source of such raising and strength. Throughout the various keynotes, panels, and paper presentations delivered at the *Decolonizing the Spirit* conferences over the years, it was clear that intellectuals, activists, and community members were evoking theories of resistance rooted in their communities, as well as deep desire for solidarity and connections between struggles and communities. The presenters were no longer speaking from that position of a spirit that has gone into hibernation, but from a political stance evoking the spirituality of their ancestors. Hence, the emphasis of this anthology is the importance of theorizing the spirit and better understanding moments and processes of spiritual emergence/re-emergence. *Decolonizing the Spirit* attempts such theorizing without claiming to exhaust the multiple methodological and epistemological angles that could anchor a theoretical framework of spirituality and de/colonization.

Furthermore, this anthology is an attempt to truly value spirit and its capacity for individual and collective decolonial transformation. Educational spaces and institutions have been and are currently a site of ongoing colonial violence. They need to be revolutionized. It is necessary to begin actively dreaming, visioning, and building toward a spiritual and political decolonial future. Classrooms can potentially provide the spaces for this incubation. We hope that this anthology will enter these spaces as a catalyst among many other wonderful works for decolonial resistance and renewal. We are dreaming of a world that values spirit and spiritual technologies and their individual, communal, and political implications for the benefit of all sentient life on this planet and this anthology is a glimpse into that/this world.

The collection is organized by themes, each addressing spiritual resurgence and decolonizing practice related to *Soul, Body, Mind and the Re-centering of Spirit*. The chapters speak to these themes from within distinct

geographical, cultural, and social locations, fostering understanding of spiritual and decolonizing practices that are present in Canada and the United States but do not originate in these nation-states. In her chapter, Njoki Nathani Wane attempts defining of ‘spirituality’ only to embrace the perpetuity of meanings and practices signified by the term in diverse cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts. Wane also asserts that the spirit cannot be colonized thus laying the foundations of a theoretical paradigm of spirituality that anchors this collection. Mandeep Kaur Mucina complicates the issue of healing and well-being by posing important questions about the South Asian diaspora in North America, decolonial resistance, and the contestation of practicing spirituality on stolen Indigenous lands in Canada.

Wambui Karanja extends the paradigm to Indigenous land and traditions, focusing on how spirituality emerges out of the unique connection that Indigenous peoples have with land and cosmos. In that connection, Karanja also finds healing and centered existence that is key to Indigenous and postcolonial personal and social well-being.

Rose Ann Torres writes about healing and well-being through centering the voices of Indigenous Aeta women healers from the Philippines. Their struggles against colonial violence are a testament to the work of resistance grounded in spirituality as site for transformation and justice. Jacqueline Benn-John critiques the current models of healing and medicine and troubles Canada’s Western hegemonic colonial narratives surrounding health care. She discusses anti-racist and anti-colonial frameworks that could serve as decolonizing solutions. Stanley Doyle-Wood’s chapter pushes the issue of health and prosperity further by connecting the spiritual to the political directly and by calling for re-articulation and re-assertion of the anger of the oppressed. Doyle-Wood theorizes anger as the body’s organizing language of/for self-defense; a language manifested in what the author calls ‘blood-anger.’

Janelle Brady utilizes the medium of poetry to conjure resistance, spiritual connection, and decolonization through the act of cooking in her mother’s kitchen. Through this poem, Brady charts generations of resistance to patriarchy, colonial violence, and anti-Blackness. Brady’s poem reveals how the act of cooking is a spiritual and decolonial praxis connecting her to her ancestors. It is a powerful reminder of how resistance, spirituality, and decoloniality can be enacted in many forms that honor our ancestral ties. Suleyman M. Demi argues the case for the revival of Indigenous eating habits in Africa. Demi writes about the colonial degradation

of eating habits utilizing his own experience as a centerpiece in the unravelling of this chapter. He explores the connection between food, culture, and African spirituality. Demi unpacks the devastation that colonial farming and diets have wrought on African bodies and land and the imperative for the decolonization and revival of Indigenous food practices on African soil.

Devi Mucina elaborates on the links between spirituality and politics amid difference by activating an Indigenous decolonizing tradition of Ubuntu dialogue so that he may speak truthfully about Ubuntu spirit while honoring and respecting his relationships with other Indigenous peoples, especially the Lekwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory he and his family live. Likewise, Kimberly L. Todd in her chapter seeks political connections to others by exploring how dreaming and dreams can reconnect people by coalescing around deep remembering of ancestry, myth, landscapes, and animal symbolism that heals and strengthens colonized and racialized minds and bodies.

Josue Tario interweaves his narrative of resistance, movement, and belonging alongside the primary research he has conducted with Latin American Canadians. Spirituality, specifically critical spirituality, is unpacked and so is its capacity for empowerment, interconnection, and love in the lives of both the author and the young individuals whose experiences he studies. Tario posits the power inherent in critical spirituality to rupture bonds of internal oppression. Likewise, in their chapter, Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees and Sayra Pinto examine in depth our unbroken connection to spirit in the face of colonization and Euro-centricity. They argue that by choosing the framework of decolonization and spirituality, we could examine the sources of our survival thus preventing distancing of Indigenous peoples from each other and the strength of spirit. Conversations about decolonization and the spirit link us to our ancestors allowing for deep remembering that re-enlivens our ability to dream a shared future of courage, resilience, and hope.

The dialogue chapter is a snapshot of a moment in time between Njoki Nathani Wane and Kimberly L. Todd. The dialogue unravels around the destruction of colonial violence materially and internally and the role of spirit from its state of dormancy to its full-fledged emergence. This theoretical discussion of spirit is punctured by storytelling, dream narratives, and laughter.

The concluding chapter by Miglena S. Todorova takes on a postsocialist view to address critically the intersections between socialism/Marxism,

colonization, and spirituality. The author argues that decolonization theories and practice in Western academies have failed to recognize Indigenous struggles in the former Soviet Union. By recognizing such violence specifically within the context of Northern Russia and highlighting the resurgence of Indigenous spirituality in Russia and Siberia, Todorova reminds us of the importance of material, spiritual and global efforts towards decolonization. The conclusion addresses this gap and extends the discourse on the broader epistemological, material, geographical and political contexts within which the authors contributing to this collection address spirituality, decolonization(s), and the future.