



SPIRITUALITY, RELIGION, AND EDUCATION

Decolonizing the Spirit in Education and Beyond

Resistance and Solidarity

Edited by
Njoki Nathani Wane
Miglena S. Todorova
Kimberly L. Todd

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Spirituality, Religion, and Education

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We dedicate this work to a vision of new decolonial futures that are steeped in love of the Earth, the reawakening of Spirit in all that we do and the collective movement towards justice and healing. Moreover, this work is our prayer for the regeneration, renewal and rebirth of the spirit within each of us, and so we also dedicate this work to the labour, the struggle and the courage it takes to walk such a path. Collectively we can do the work that needs to be done in order to heal our planet in the wake of climate change, to upend and dismantle colonial systems and structures and to center the work of Spirit once again.

FOREWORD

This book is a prayer and celebration of the distance we have traveled and the travails we have endured. Our journeys have left their marks and throughout it all Spirit is immutable and cannot be contained, diminished, and is ever present. Spirit is our breath. Every author in this book has their own dance and their own wisdom. Each brings their knowledge, and they are also in the process of regaining their ancestral knowledge and the centrality of Spirit in that knowledge as they reclaim their voices. We share this process with everyone included here. The process of our reconstitution and our reconnection to the Sacred (Spirit) is the central project of our Indigenous selves.

The ongoing process of colonization attempts to separate Indigeneity, Land, and Spirit, continually obscuring the pathways and connections that make their relationship evident. Indigeneity, Land, and Spirit are all one. They are intertwined. They are not separate parts of something. Indigeneity is bestowed upon us by the Land, in its deepest expression and culturally by people who are part of ancestral lineages connected to the Land. The Land is Spirit-made manifest. Spirit, Land, and Indigeneity are all ephemeral and abundant. They are not defined by human constructs of oppression or liberation. *Decolonizing the Spirit in Education and Beyond—Resistance and Solidarity* grapples with the contradictions and paradoxes of our relationship to Indigeneity, and with the contradictions and paradoxes of our relationship to Indigeneity, Land, and Spirit. It offers a landscape of interdisciplinary theories, practices, and approaches for decolonization and resistance. Its basic premise

is that Spirit cannot be colonized. This book is an enactment of solidarity as we stand together in the effort to see clearly and reclaim our birthright. We are different from each other in keeping with our hard-won expressions of our Indigeneity in the midst of this continuing experience of oppression. Because each of our voices is unique and distinct, we are choosing to be in appreciation with each expression of sovereign logic. Therefore, we will highlight text directly from each chapter that we believe demonstrates each of our unique perspectives. This book is organized into four parts: Soul, Body, Mind, and the Re-centering of Spirit. Each part reveals the multiplicity of ways in which we are working diligently to make evident the richness of our lived, observed, and embodied manifestations. The following are highlights from each chapter in each contributor's own voice:

PART I: SOUL

Spirituality

In Chapter 2, Njoki Nathani Wane asks “Is Decolonizing the Spirit Possible?” She poignantly points out that spiritual knowledges remain an essential part of self and resurfaces even in the face of oppression and colonization.

What has amazed me, however, is how members of the colonized people held on to certain knowledges that they pushed to their sub-consciousness and whenever the environment was clear, they would pass on this knowledge to their children or their neighbors. This is particularly true when it comes to African Indigenous healing and spiritual practices. It's very liberating to be able to freely articulate your inner self, your spiritual self and not shy away from lifting the lid to let your light shine as you embrace your total self.

Land

In Chapter 3, “Spirituality and a Search for Home: The Complexities of Practising Sikhism on Indigenous Land,” Mandeep Kaur Mucina adds,

I have searched for a place called home for much of my life, but I find I am more settled in my contention with it and with the notion that this will be a perpetual search. At times it may be satisfied and I may feel at home;

at other times I may feel at a loss for home. However, I am okay with this never-ending search and believe in the notion of searching. I will find peace and comfort in living in the present dailyness of breathing and being respectful to all the beings, the places and the stories that live around me. Home is in my spirit and I am happy to have had the Gurudwara to heal my past spiritual injuries and move forward, toward a new vision and way of being “Indigenous to place.”

In Chapter 4, Wambui Karanja, *Land and Healing: A Decolonizing Inquiry for Centering Land as the Site of Indigenous Medicine and Healing*, speaks of her own sense of healing and connection through land,

In my travels back and forth from my country of residence to my country of birth, I can also testify to the euphoric spiritual connection I feel with my country of birth and the wholeness and connectedness I experience when I visit, a form of overwhelming peacefulness that makes me feel spiritually connected to my ancestral homeland. I conceptualize this feeling as healing from the land through my spiritual and indigenous connection to it. It speaks to the centrality of the physical and spiritual relationship and connectedness I have with the land in my motherland.

We think it is apropos to say that each contribution made in these first three chapters seeks to resituate our experiences of the Sacred within the Soul through our embodiment of Indigeneity, our relationship with Land and our relationship with Spirit.

PART II: BODY

Healing

In Chapter 5, “Healing and Well-Being as Tools of Decolonization and Social Justice: Anti-Colonial Praxis of Indigenous Women in the Philippines,” Rose Ann Torres shares her learning from healer women of the Aeta people in the Philippines,

In the course of many honest exchanges and the simple, but powerful, act of listening, the Aeta healers in the Circle taught me that I should always be ready to reference the ultimate library of knowledge: what our Mother Nature is willing to give to us. These are lessons in limits and possibilities, and truths such as that we are made from nature and neither the controller

nor arbiter of the possible. These ecological, biological, physical and emotional truths are ones Western science and ecology are only now rediscovering. When I met them, this set of caring women taught me how to pay attention to their way of life and practices.

In Chapter 6, “Decolonizing Western Medicine and Systems of Care: Implications for Education,” Jacqueline Benn-John explains the impact of colonization on her own understanding the value of her people’s traditional healing practices while reclaiming a new understanding and appreciation for her own traditions,

Until recently, my narrow definition of health and healing—mind, body and spirit—reflected Western hegemonic notions of health and healing. In my colonized understanding of health and healing, there is an erasure of where and how humans are situated within space and community, and what our relationship with this space/community is. As part of my decolonizing journey, I developed an understanding of Indigenous health that challenged normative perceptions about Indigenous health. I was able to empathize with marginalized traditional healers and I developed a deeper appreciation for my cultural knowledge of traditional healing.

In Chapter 7, “BLOOD-ANGER: The Spirituality of Anti-Colonial Blood-Anger for Self-Defense” Stanley Doyle-Wood brings us to the state of re-membering as an anti-colonial act,

The word *re-membering* [my italics] plays on the image of reordering the members (as in bodily members), creating a counter [embodied] memory or refraining in the body of goodness, spirit and interconnection. It involves both affirming sacred moments in one’s past and acknowledging the sacredness of the self in the present. It includes reconnecting with spiritual and cultural traditions that have meaning for one’s life now and re-membering the body’s connection with the Earth (pp94). Active re-membering as relational to untying and therefore anti-colonial blood-anger are all of this and more. It is constant, reflexive, ongoing and active. Active re-membering is an epistemological position that is lived/alive. It is tactile. It burns. It breathes. It screams. It whispers. Active re-membering requires that our blood-anger as the body-tongue of our blood-memory talks with and back to our bodies; that our blood-anger engages in conversation with our blood-memories which at this point has become radically politicized and de-victimized. This talking,

this conversation, this dialogue [with-and-by blood-anger to-and-from blood-memory and the whole of the self] are a whole-bodied listening, hearing, feeling, re-connecting, re-remembering, anti-colonial blood-anger talk.

Food

In Chapter 8, Janelle Brady’s poem, “In my Mother’s Kitchen: Spirituality and Decolonization,” confronts us with the following moment,

I remembered her words to me in the kitchen to “Move yuh hand fast”
and how we would laugh | We would laugh because it was comical, but
true, no time to delay, and as she would say, you | need to “cut n go tru”

In Chapter 9, “Reclaiming Cultural Identity Through Decolonization of Food Habits,” Suleyman M. Demi shares the following memory connecting food, land and embodied indigenous knowledge,

I vividly remember my grandmother used to prepare a meal consisting of leaves called “Zoogala gandi” (in Hausa language) mixed with “gari” and oil. After boiling the leaves, she sieved the leaves to separate the solid part from the liquid. As children, we sipped the leftover liquid, an action that received no reprimands from my grandmother because she knew its medicinal value as according to her, she inherited it from her great-grandparents. About ten years later, after I had graduated from the university and was teaching in the city, I heard of a wonder plant called “moringa” which according to scientists cured several diseases. The leaves were dried, grinded and the powdered form sold to schools, corporate organizations, as well as individuals in Ghana to incorporate in their food. Our school decided to purchase the seedlings to plant on our school compound. To my utmost surprise, the wonder plant is no other plant than “Zoogala gandi” that we were exposed to several years earlier. This encouraged me to value our food cultures bequeathed to us by our ancestors.

PART III: MIND

Consciousness

In Chapter 10, “A Journal on Ubuntu Spirituality,” Devi Mucina reveals the complexities and gifts to be found in the relationships indigenous

people living on Turtle Island successfully make with Indigenous peoples from the Americas,

As I locate myself in southern Africa among the Ubuntu, while living here on Turtle Island, I am cognizant that I am a visitor and an unwelcome settler on Indigenous territories. Colonial governance structures and other settlers welcomed me to these Indigenous territories. I also acknowledge our ancestors that were brought here forcibly, those that lost their lives in the middle passage and our relatives that continue to leave their territories due to war and political prosecution. I raise my hands to you in recognitions of the tensions you experience about being here, but I particularly want to acknowledge that as I speak about Ubuntu spirituality, I am cognizant that I am privileging a particular Indigenous spirituality while being in the spiritual context of Turtle Island and its Indigenous peoples. The friendships and familial bonds I have developed with Indigenous peoples on these territories are saving me from colonial amnesia and trickery. I know home physically and spiritually because you have welcomed me into your colonial struggle. Our engagements about Indigenous resurgence shape my everyday actions. Through our relational bonds, I am learning to walk, play, live and work.

Chapters 5 through 9 focus on the exploration of embodied domination and resilience, on engaging with Indigeneity, Land and Spirit to fully embody ourselves in our bodies.

In Chapter 11, “Shedding of the Colonial Skin: The Decolonial Potentialities of Dreaming,” Kimberly L. Todd shows us how dreaming connects us to Spirit,

Dreaming has taught me the language of spirit. It has taught me to read dreams. It literally initiated me into the realm of spirit through the course of a reoccurring dream.

Through this year of the Sea Turtle, I was birthed anew and it took me the full year to determine the meaning behind Her symbolism. I can now in hindsight understand that this process was actually the shedding of my colonial conditioning and is still continually decolonizing me. After that year I could no longer adhere to the worldview I had been born into. The dream process completely ruptured that worldview; it was as if I had undergone a radical re-membering of who I was. Perhaps, not unlike a soul retrieval, I experienced the great power inherent in dreaming and realized that it should be valued because it provides a gateway into the sacred that can help initiate and facilitate the decolonizing process.

PART IV: THE RE-CENTERING OF SPIRIT

In Chapter 12, “Critical Spirituality: Decolonizing the Self,” Josue Tario speaks from the voice of *latinidad* and expounds on the idea of *critical spirituality* and its potential role of advancing the agenda of decolonization,

I believe that death to the self/ego is the closest thing to nirvana/heaven/higher form of existence. The temporality of life will always include movement, uncertainty, fear, insecurity and pain. The best way to deal with this is to try to surrender the ego, realize the interconnectedness of the universe and love. I would like to conclude by recognizing the amount of privilege I have, sitting here in a nice office, writing about the decolonization of the self and spiritual transcendence when many of our Indigenous and African descendant brothers and sisters are fighting for material decolonization of the land. Decolonization cannot only be about theory or pontifications, it must be about praxis and tangible action. Many are literally fighting to survive and dying daily because of colonization. However, I do believe that decolonization of both the land and the self must be done for true decolonization to take place one day. The self has colonized this earth. The spirit cannot be colonized because it is what decolonizes the self.

In Chapter 13, Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees and Sayra Pinto: “A Landscape of Sacred Regeneration and Resilience,” we speak to the centrality of connecting to the Sacred and the need to be driven and guided by faith,

Our individual journeys have guided us to choose to expend our energy dreaming into the future from a foundation of the Sacred. We will not attempt to define the Sacred since we see defining the Sacred in itself as a reductive act and a replay of colonization. At best, we can attempt to point toward the Sacred, an act that is never to be mistaken for the Sacred itself. Although we will not offer a definition, we affirm that when one encounters the Sacred, one knows one has done so. The Sacred has many names and faces all over the world. All of these point to the ineffable, the Great Mystery, and all the names given to the Sacred Source. The turn toward the Sacred means the turn toward faith even in the heart of rationality. We affirm that faith is driving the car, not rationality. Faith is an expression of our intimate, dynamic relationship with the Unknown and Unknowable.

Lastly, an interview by Kimberly L. Todd of Njoki Nathani Wane serves as the closing dialogue for this book. Miglena S. Todorova’s

conclusion helps us all bring this experience to a close. We hope that the chorus of voices included in this book offers you ways to support, affirm and enhance your own ideas on your own journey relating to Indigeneity, Land, Spirit and decolonization. We believe it is an important gift to maintain our unique and earnest voices that we may be able to connect and meet other ones who also yearn and courageously live lives that unapologetically connect to that which is Sacred.

Burlington, USA

Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees
Sayra Pinto

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We would like to acknowledge the incredible work of our contributors. Their work is honest, poignant and inspiring. We thank them for the patience they have had with us throughout this process. We would also like to thank our publishers for the labour they have put into this project. We would also like to thank our ancestors (parents, grandparents, great-grandparents moving backwards through time). We can always feel their love and presence guiding us when we need it most. Their spirits led to this project—out of one, many have joined to reignite a re-centering of Spirit.

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Wambui Karanja is a Ph.D. student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Canada. Her research interests lie in anti-colonial thought, anti-racism theories and frameworks, decolonizing theories, Indigenous knowledges and land rights, development and modernization theories, Afrocentric frameworks and gender issues. Her current research explores Indigenous conceptions of land at the nexus of colonial/neo-colonial encounters. Wambui has published on African Women's land rights, Indigenous knowledges and the coloniality of Western research practices in developing countries. She has a bachelor of laws degree from the University of Nairobi, Kenya, and a master's degree in law from the University of Toronto, Canada, and has recently completed extensive research on the role of Elders' cultural knowledges in schools. She has a passion for community development, equity and social justice issues.

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Mandeep Kaur Mucina is an Assistant Professor at the University of Victoria with over 15 years of frontline experience as a child and youth care practitioner and social worker. Mandeep's research and social justice work focuses on family violence, gender-based violence, understanding the role of trauma in migration and exploring second-generation immigrant youth's stories of resistance, identity and encounters with racism

in the diaspora, all from a feminist critical race and anti-colonial lens. Mandeep has in-depth experience conducting life histories with racialized women and girls. Mandeep's current research explores the intersections between migration, trauma and refugee and immigrant children, youth and families' encounters with child welfare and the criminal justice systems. Furthermore, she will be expanding her research on violence in South Asian communities in British Columbia.

Sayra Pinto leads change processes that support the transformation of nonprofits, schools, colleges, city governments, hospitals, police departments, neighborhoods and communities. She has an undergraduate degree from Middlebury College, an MFA from Goddard College and a Ph.D. from the Union Institute and University. Her work is informed, inspired and fueled by the trajectory of struggle and transcendence of Indigenous peoples and our collective obligation to strengthen communities. As an immigrant from Honduras who is a naturalized citizen, Sayra builds connections and collaborations that create profound systems change and that engage individuals in deeply transformational experiences. She is currently working on a book on leadership, is a Leadership Team member of the University of Vermont's Master's in Leadership for Sustainability and does freelance consulting with organizations and institutions seeking to create cultures of connection, belonging, well-being, innovation and excellence.

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Josue Tario is an Equity Program Advisor for the Toronto District School Board. His work is focused on providing educators with equitable pedagogies using an anti-oppressive framework. He also does work with students around equity, human rights issues and leadership capacity. Josue has an honors bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree in education. Most importantly, he is a proud father to an amazing fourteen-year-old son and loves to spend time with him.

Kimberly L. Todd is a fourth year Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Social Justice Education. Her research interests include education, decolonization, spirituality, dreaming and teacher praxis. She is a certified educator who has taught in South Korea, in the United Arab Emirates and in a First Nations community in North West Saskatchewan. She has also designed curricular resources for the David Suzuki Foundation and Amazon Watch.

Miglena S. Todorova is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Justice Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. She is also the Director of the Centre for Media, Culture and Education at OISE. Her research and teaching are in the areas of racial formation, transnational feminism(s) and post-socialist studies, focusing especially on social relations and knowledge/cultural production. Dr. Todorova is an international scholar whose work advances feminist, intersectional and relational paradigms linking local and global sites and issues.

Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees is an artist/catalyst. She has spent a life at the crossroads where species, cultures, beliefs and the unknown collide and find both dissonance and resonance. Her work helps humans re-orient to our Indigenous mind and regenerate our essential relationship with the Earth's wisdom. She is part recipient of the Lila Wallace International Artist Award and has held positions as Academic Challenge Scholar in Interdisciplinary Studies at Miami University and Scholar in Residence in the schools of Business and Fine Arts at Miami University and at the Cleveland Institute of Art. She is currently on the faculty of the Master's in Leadership for Sustainability Program at the University of Vermont's Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources.

Njoki Nathani Wane is a recognized scholar in the areas of Black feminisms in Canada & Africa, African Indigenous knowledges, African women and spirituality. Dr. Wane is currently the Chair of the Department of Social Justice Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). One of her most recent publications is *Indigenous African Knowledge Production: Food Processing Practices Among Kenyan Rural Women*. She has co-authored an Anti-racist training manual, *Equity in Practice: Transformational Training Resource*, with Larissa Cairncross, *Ruptures: Anti-Colonial & Anti-Racist Feminist Theorizing* with Jennifer Jagire & Zahra Murad, *A Handbook on African Traditional Healing*

Approaches & Research Practices with Erica Neeganagwedin. She has also co-edited *Spirituality, Education & Society: An Integrated Approach* with Energy Manyimo & Eric Ritskes and *The Politics of Cultural Knowledge* with Arlo Kempf and Marlon Simmons. Prof. Wane headed the Office of Teaching Support in 2009–2012. She has been nominated TVO Best Lecturer and is the recipient of the Harry Jerome Professional Excellence Award (2008) and of the African Women Achievement Award (2007). She is also a recipient of the prestigious David E. Hunt Award for Excellence in Graduate Education for 2016, University of Toronto and the President of Toronto Teaching Award, 2017.



Introduction

*Miglena S. Todorova, Njoki Nathani Wane
and Kimberly L. Todd*

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