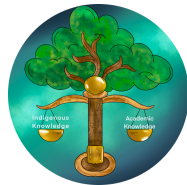


Decolonize Nature



Mercy Gloria Ashepet, Alena Clark, Mathijs Geerts Danau, Naina Goel, Luan Kahili, Sondre Løcka, Celeste Maes, Sofie Ulrix, Matthias Van Ongevalle, Wangari Wambui, Zheng Zhou, enrolled as students at KU Leuven
With Liesl Roos from PXL MAD and Amon Mugume curator of Natural History at the Uganda Museum

Decolonizing Nature is a broad yet an ambiguous concept that can mean different things for different people. This was no different to the members of the challenge, and hence necessitated the need for several debates and educational sessions to begin to comprehend such a complex problem. Robin Wall Kimmerer's book "Braiding Sweetgrass" discussed how indigenous wisdom may work with scientific knowledge, and inspired the group's conversation about what decolonization looked like and how to represent such insights. Other activities included hosting a webinar focused on the "Custodians of Nature" in Uganda regarding incorporating traditional knowledge in modern practices, as well as interviewing Dr. Mamphela Ramphele on economic and community activism. After several sessions and activities, the group agreed that for nature to reach a state of decolonisation, both indigenous and scientific knowledge systems have to complement each other. The following are some of the possible processes that we came up with to guide our discussions and work towards achieving the task: the first one involved creating a platform representing marginalized opinions; the second one is to step away from anthropocentric definitions of ecology and bring about change in our minds, and lastly to respect and listen to the indigenous knowledge based on nature and balance it with modern science. These processes represent the first steps towards listening to indigenous knowledge based on nature, and balancing it with modern science. The next step for the Decolonize Nature challenge involves emphasizing community engagement and education on the concept through a "Decolonize Nature Weekend" happening in May. This final project aspires to raise awareness of the need to decolonize nature and incorporate indigenous knowledge with scientific knowledge systems.

CONCEPT BOARD

Restore connection to nature and other humans by focusing on our equality and that we are part of the same natural system. The undoing of colonialism. Rethink/reshape/reposition of the existed human-nature relationship. Shift from dominance to participants. Removing barriers and build harmony and sustainable. Trying to live with past errors. Find other ways to live together.

I think decolonization should be described in several steps. It's not about one particular event, but about a whole process that needs to be tackled from the roots. Acknowledging mistakes from the past, which requires profound knowledge about colonialism, is an important first step. But it must certainly not stop there. A new reality must be built in which indigenous people, whose voices have been marginalized for decades, have full participation rights in decision making.

WHAT IS DECOLONIZE?

SUMMARY: Listening and respecting other sides of the story, removing barriers and step away from "superior" models, reshaping and building a post-colonial mentality. Listening to and respecting other stories. Telling the entire story! All sides of the story.

MOTIVATIONS:

SUMMARY: Gaining comprehensive knowledge of the relationship between human and the nature. Reflect on the human-centred perspective. Broadening and gaining knowledge about other cultures. Cross disciplinary study. Learning about links between nature and colonization. Moving away from the idea that nature is a unlimited resource.

I felt like there is a risk of knowledge loss if we don't give the platform to indigenous knowledge systems. I am also eager to share what I know with the team and have fun filled moments together. I am interested in working in museums and cultural preservation, but also highlight other people's voices.

To begin with, we need to recognize the ongoing power imbalances on how research in done. Then we purpose to undo the processes and system thinking with a decolonized mind.

DECOLONIZE AND ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRACTICES:

SUMMARY: 1. Decolonize your mind: language. 2. Know your histories: pay respect to the pre-colonial inhabitants of the land where the research takes place. 3. Decolonize access: access to scholarly literature and data sovereignty for indigenous people. 4. Decolonize expertise: have indigenous people in the room and accept them as experts. 5, Practice ethical ecology in inclusive teams: build knowledge collectively instead of individually.

Shift our view of what we see as 'scientific' and include indigenous narratives/knowledge. Their knowledge should be treated equally to break down the 'western supremacy/dominance' in this field.

PROCESSES TOWARDS DECOLONIZATION

SUMMARY: Including marginalized views on nature and science. Move away from superior definitions. Include non-western voices and narratives in how we define our histories, society, etc. Give the marginalized views a platform to express their views independently.

The first step is in my eyes the understanding of the word colonization and what its implications are.

BRAIDING SWEETGRASS

The book stresses the importance of including indigenous knowledge in how we understand the nature. Nature gives gifts to you, your only role is to be open-eyed and present: you didn't earn it, so you can't claim it or sell it. The author as the living proof that only when you combine western science with indigenous knowledge, you get the whole picture.

The book stresses the importance of including indigenous knowledge in how we understand the nature. I loved learning about the origin/creation stories of the Potawatomi and how it relates to Christianity/Capitalism

REFLECTIONS

We need to see the bigger picture, there are many layers to colonization which are often over-looked. Museums have historically benefitted from "othering" non-white people by presenting (stolen) artefacts through white interpretations as a means of creating "scientific" barriers between people of different "races" and cultures. We can start to change this narrative by letting the people whose cultures are represented in the museums, share their history and knowledge, so as to acknowledge the deeply damaging history of colonialism (in museums or otherwise). The African Tervuren Museum does try, step by step, to change the situation, and have started the process of returning objects collected under dubious circumstances, stolen or obtained by force.

Most of my thoughts have been how do we begin to tangibly address decolonizing parts of our lives, like how do we start to take those first steps in decolonizing museums to be able to see results finally, what does a decolonized world look like?