



THE UNIVERSAL
UNDRESSING

DECOLONIAL REFLECTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS,
AND POSTULATIONS IN THE 2020S.

NICHOLAS
PANSENGROUW

The Universal Undressing

Decolonial Reflections, Representations, and Postulations in the 2020s

Nicholas Pansegrouw (ed.)

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For the downtrodden and forgotten.

"Is there life before death?"

— *ANONYMOUS WALL GRAFFITI*

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Prologue

I OPEN MY EYES. *Blink... blink again. I look around, my senses taken awash with the drone of a hairdryer and countless parents on their phones instead of watching their children swim laps at the local pool.*

I too am guilty of real-life neglect, putting my eyes to the laptop screen at the expense of witnessing my kids' progress at backstroke. And then – in a surreal instant echoing what friends of a distant yesteryear used to say to me – I think amidst the dozens of colored Christmas cards hanging over my bald head, "THAT'S THE THING!".

THAT'S THE THING: the ability to choose your distractions. For the longest time, I thought distraction's core was the essential element driving the psyche, only to learn that some people do not possess the luxury of tailored distractions. Nope, some people are too busy dying: if not from starvation, lack of water, or preventable diseases, they're dying to be noticed in a world that has no use for them other than disposable economic utility.

This type of reality is called Coloniality. The opposite is called Decoloniality.

Apart from the fact this book forms part of a university course requirement, its true origins lie with the birth of modern economic history, which, for all practical purposes, started with the proliferation of a mercantile capitalist economy via Western European seaboard nations five hundred-plus years ago. World history has subsequently blitzkrieged through vicious machinations. At the present end of that black rainbow crafted from money,

theory, death, and hope sits today's objective reality, the nature of which shouts 'distraction!' while slapping you in the face with ubiquitous inequality.

*Built on five hundred years of Heart Of Darkness-esque history, this book aims to reflect the lives of people who, like me, are starting to understand how vicious and confused humanity can be. It's not that our species' appetite for destruction was ever in doubt – the economic term *planned obsolescence* is as polite a euphemism to describe this as possible – but cynicism can be usurped if will exists, and this book... well, this book is a veritable shrine to W.L.L.*

Hailing from around the world, this book's contributors have taken time out of their busy schedules and lives to reflect on those busy schedules and lives. Having either volunteered, agreed to, or been playfully coerced into offering grassroots voices on what Coloniality and Decoloniality mean to them and the communities they share, these brave people have been offered an open mandate to reflect on how Coloniality/Decoloniality influences their daily lives. It goes without saying that I'm inexpressibly thankful to each of them for their love, courage, and desire to articulate versions of a more inclusive, better world for everyone.

*This book's layout is designed to work from the local to the international. Following the book's introduction (*What is Decoloniality?*), the first article (penned by 2017 Ernest Cole Award for Photography winner Daylin Paul) discusses the effects of Coloniality in a South African context. Each succeeding article branches out to include the African colonial condition as experienced by people living in the Southern and Northern hemispheres. This was done intentionally to illustrate that Coloniality (and hence, Decoloniality) is a global issue requiring global solutions (stemming from collaborative thinking and implementation) that can be implemented from a grassroots level through to the highest tiers of society.*

As the book's editor, I have spent substantial time with each contributor, either in person or online. It goes without saying the same holds for what material they submitted. Concerning the book's content, I felt it essential that each contributor's thoughts made it to the page according to their individual contexts, all of which were informed by their respective life experiences along with information I provided to bring this life-affirming project to print.

*As much as the book production process was shared democratically, between the article contributors and me, Decolonial thought requires that ALL participants (which in this case means YOU) take an active role in sustaining whatever momentum results. This is enabled in a surface-level sense by me offering *Questions for Reflection* at the end of each article, the*

purpose being to stoke latent or active thoughts into actionable context. I urge you to take sufficient time when considering the scope of each piece and to do so equally, when weighing up your thoughts against the questions and how they relate to your context.

And with that, please join us for a journey into the Heart of Lightness. May our shared trip – starting with this book and growing into whatever must result – be one of sharing, learning, growing, and the birth of much actionable hope.

- Nicholas Pansegrouw, January 2022

● NP ●

What is Decoloniality?

By Nicholas Pansegrouw
(South Africa - Taiwan)

Editor's note:

A writer and teacher currently living in Taiwan, Nicholas Pansegrouw is the editor of this book. Having learned about Decoloniality as part of his Unisa (University of South Africa) studies, he has since assembled a group of amazing people to contribute what Decoloniality-oriented articles form this book's content.

IN ITS CURRENT FORM, *our globalizing world is arguably the product of colonially-catalyzed forces, the sum of which have coalesced to create what Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano has termed the colonial matrix of power. The core intention of this socio-economic superstructure is to protect and propagate the Euro-American modernity we currently live enmeshed within.*

According to renowned Argentine semiotician Walter D. Mignolo, the colonial matrix of power began gaining significant global traction when latter fifteenth-century Europe was transformed by heavy commercial activities, the sum of which fashioned the structure of Western Christendom post-Roman Empire into the idea of 'modern Europe.' When that century culminated in the 'discovery and conquest of America,' the possibility of massive exploitation of labor and lands via colonial conquest provided countries like Spain, Portugal, Holland, France, and England with unrivaled commercial options. Capping all of this, the European mercantile economy transformed into a mercantile capitalist economy within but a few short decades, and in doing so, formulated the core structure for hegemonic Euro-modernity.

Five hundred years later, it is clear to see the significance of adding capitalist to mercantile economy, in that mercantile capitalist economy defines the enduring economic efficacy of colonialism. With the New World having been put under the heel of European seaboard powers, it became obvious that the growth of colonizers' power, influence, and economies worked proportionally to how much force they were willing to use. Colonizers understood that more could be gained from long-term cooperation with local populations than from committing wholesale genocide. Accordingly, theological (e.g., religion) and philosophical soft-power elements (e.g., Descartes' Rationalism) were deemed necessary to 'justify' violent behavior when appropriating foreign lands and subjugating local populations. And it is now these elements – instilled as socio-political cornerstones – that have and continue to drive colonial culture ever forward.

Returning to now, our world is stricken with division, uncertainty, and inequality. By elevating certain individuals and groups of people to positions of socio-economic status (and hence ability) over others, the colonial matrix of power has evolved to include and exclude according to what propagates its core tenets, the main one being to retain and utilize power on behalf of those whom the system benefits most.

Despite Coloniality being a worldwide phenomenon, its ill effects are most evident in the 'developing' world, which is synonymous with the continent of Africa. Having been carved up 'like a cake' and shared between colonial powers in the early eighteenth century, Africa has undoubtedly rebounded, albeit as a bruised and beaten entity that remains subservient to accommodating – either through workforce, cultural appropriation, or resources – the wills and whims of capitalist markets the world over. Being at the bottom of the pile, the only way is up, and Africa – as an avatar for all those downtrodden and forgotten – is fast realizing its unfathomable potential.

As the counterpoint to Coloniality, Decoloniality is a pivotal cog in recognizing the need for a more accommodating world, both in terms of social and existential recognition and what material needs should be met to maximize the potential of everyone sharing this planet. Through a process of delinking from the insidious and invisible processes dictating our lives, humankind – along with wisdom, technology, and the wish for a fairer, better future – can come together and deliver on the love, open-mindedness, and sense of community we are forced to bury to ascend the colonial matrix of power ladder.

• d.p •

The Coloniality Crisis

By Daylin Paul
(South Africa)

Editor's note:

Daylin Paul is an award-winning South African photographer, author, and environmentalist dedicated to fighting for justice, whether it be on an individual, community, social, or climate level. His amazing body of work can be viewed at <https://www.daylinpaul.com/>.



Broken Land, Daylin Paul

THE FIRST PHOTOGRAPH in my book *Broken Land* (Jacana, 2019) is of the ruins of a gateway into a demolished Ndebele village. This long-abandoned place, its people relocated to modern government housing many kilometers away, was sacrificed to make way for a coal mine. The mine dumps now loom omnipresent in the background of this shattered village, a once-lively place whose history, art, and people (along with their connection to the land they once occupied) is now broken.

When the idea of making a photo book about coal mining in my native South Africa first occurred to me, my interest was initially on the environmental and climate change aspects of industries that extract and burn coal to generate electricity for a power-desperate developing nation. However, I soon realized that colonialism, capitalism, and power were inextricably linked and involved in the process.

In the colonial-capitalist worldview, land, water, trees, animals, and people are only valuable for their economic worth. Or, simply put, as commodities. Land is valuable only in terms of what can be built, produced, or extracted from beneath it. Water means irrigation or

a dumping spot for pollution and sewage, trees equal timber, animals are livestock or hunting trophies, and people are reduced to labor or, more precisely, consumer-workers.

In many ways, South Africa is the perfect example of how colonialism and capitalism – left to their own devices – can change the trajectories of entire civilizations. Consider that, in the case of European powers desperate to reach Indian spices, the Cape of Good Hope (as Cape Town was first called) was established by the Dutch East India Company as a vital halfway house. Its Company Gardens (which still stand today) were meant to provide fresh produce for sailors rounding the Cape to reach Asia. Slaves, mostly from other Dutch East India "outposts" in Malaysia and other island nations, were brought to Africa to tend these gardens and provide the necessary labor needed to sustain the company's enterprises.

The discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and the gold in the Witwatersrand rapidly changed the strategic importance of South Africa. What resulted was two wars between the British and the Boers (Europeans from the Netherlands, Germany, and France who had formed a new national identity in Africa as "Afrikaners"). In subsequent efforts to mend lingering mistrust between these groups following the cessation of hostilities, the Union of South Africa was created, whose economic and social policies helped British and Afrikaners form a new identity known as "Europeans" in Africa.

These policies were at the expense of the indigenous Black population and the descendants of the Malaysian slaves and Indian indentured laborers who had been imported into the east coast province of Natal to work sugar cane plantations. Black people suffered most, though, and amongst the most insidious of pre-apartheid policies was that of the Hut Tax, which forced Black people to find jobs (mostly in the mines) within the colonial system to pay levies for homes and land they had hitherto lived on peacefully for hundreds of years.

It was via this colonial system (undergirded by forced labor) that the nation-state of South Africa was formed. The South African project was designed to benefit Europeans, albeit off the labor of non-Europeans living second-class lives. Thus, it is hardly surprising that, after the Second World War and with the British Empire's power waning, right-wing Nationalists won political power by electioneering on the promise of a new system designed to entrench hyper colonial-capitalism system further. This would tragically come to life in the form of Apartheid.

It is within this context that I was born, in 1985, during the last State of Emergency enacted by the crumbling Apartheid regime. The descendant of Indian indentured laborers who had given up their country, families, and even their religion and identities to become

Anglican "British-Indians" in Africa. Growing up in the segregated Indian township of Chatsworth, my earliest memories are of being surrounded by those who looked, spoke, and ate as I did. I was unaware of any other reality until I started school. In the early 90s, the South African government opened schools that had previously been 'Whites-only' for all children. It was on my school playground and in its classrooms where I was first made to feel "different", "other," and perhaps most profoundly, "less".

If Decoloniality begins anywhere, it starts in the minds of colonized people. A quote by Steve Biko has always served as a guiding light in dark times:

"Being black is not a matter of pigmentation, but being black is a reflection of a mental attitude. Blacks are those who are by law or tradition, politically, economically, and socially discriminated against as a group in South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realization of their aspirations."

My work as a photographer has allowed me to travel to many parts of this world. Most of these places exist in "developing" (i.e., previously colonized) countries, where inequality, poverty, and suffering are rife. In recent years, I've come to specialize in environmental and climate justice. More often than not, I have found these causes overlap with social justice. It is no accident that the same forces pushing humanity to the brink of extinction through climate change believe they are doing nothing wrong and that their industrialized vision of the world will bring "progress" and "development" to the world at large.

Decoloniality is an integral aspect of this fight for survival. With it comes respect for different cultures and forms of knowledge, specifically indigenous knowledge that is inextricably linked to the lands producing them. The world is more connected now than ever, yet our connection with the world is undeniably broken. I believe Decoloniality's mission is to reconnect that which colonialism and capitalism have broken: our relationship with people and the planet over the literal and figurative poison that is profits.

Questions for Reflection:

Reflecting on what Daylin wrote, do you believe you possess the empathic capacity to truly appreciate the 'African condition'? By this, I mean: through Daylin's description of South African history and how it has molded the present, can you understand why so much inequality exists in South Africa, and why its disenfranchised people do whatever they can to

at best achieve socio-economic parity and at minimum a life resembling something worth living?

• J H •

From Gratitude to Decoloniality

By James Hoets
(South Africa-Taiwan)

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