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Decolonising African Minds: A remarkable step towards healing

Douglas John Chikhowe Banda*

Faculty of Management Sciences, Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa

*Corresponding author: chikhowebanda@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study employs a systematic qualitative approach to explore the concept of Decolonising African Minds and its implications for healing and empowerment in contemporary African societies. Drawing on 34 peer-reviewed articles published between 1972 and 2022, the research critically examines the historical, cultural, and psychological dimensions of decolonization. The findings suggest that decolonization is not merely an academic exercise, but a transformative process aimed at reclaiming identity, restoring agency, and challenging colonial epistemologies that continue to shape African realities. The analysis highlights the central role of indigenous knowledge systems, critical pedagogy, and the re-evaluation of dominant historical narratives in fostering both individual and collective healing. It further emphasizes the importance of education, cultural renaissance, and creative expressions such as art and literature in preserving collective memory and strengthening cultural identity. Additionally, the study underscores the socio-political dimensions of decolonization, identifying community engagement, activism, and participatory approaches as essential mechanisms for empowerment and sustainable societal transformation. Overall, the research advocates for a holistic and integrative framework that combines historical consciousness, cultural pride, and active civic participation. By decolonizing African minds, societies can promote resilience, unity, and long-term healing, contributing to the creation of more just, inclusive, and self-determined futures.

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Introduction

The discourse surrounding decolonization has evolved significantly in recent decades, particularly in the context of

Africa (Mahmood, 1996). The phrase “Decolonizing African Minds” serves as a rallying cry for scholars, activists, and citizens alike, urging a comprehensive reassessment of the

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legacies of colonialism that continue to permeate various aspects of African life (Wane, 2013). Oelofsen (2015) notes that the colonial experience has left deep scars on the continent, affecting not only political and economic structures but also cultural identities and psychological frameworks. As such, understanding the process of decolonization is essential for healing the wounds inflicted over centuries (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

Decolonization transcends the mere withdrawal of colonial powers; it involves an introspective journey toward reclaiming African identity, values, and knowledge systems that were marginalized during colonial rule (Diop, 1989). Wa Thiong'o (1986) emphasizes the pivotal role of language and culture in this reclamation process, suggesting that decolonization begins in the mind, where colonial ideologies were firmly entrenched. This call for a mental renaissance emphasizes that the healing process is deeply intertwined with the reclamation of African narratives, which entails a critical examination of history, culture, and identity (Memmi, 1967).

Recent scholarship has illuminated the need for a holistic approach to decolonization that goes beyond theoretical discourse. This approach emphasizes practical applications, community engagement, and grassroots activism. (Akinmolayan, 2024). Scholars like Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) argue that engaging with indigenous knowledge systems is vital for fostering a sense of pride and ownership among Africans regarding their histories and cultures. By centring local experiences and understandings, the decolonization movement provides a platform for Africans to articulate their own stories, thereby resisting the monolithic narratives imposed by colonial powers (David, 2024; Wane, 2013).

In addition, the psychological impact of colonialism must be addressed as part of this healing process. The work of Fanon (1967) sheds light on the psychological dimensions of colonialism and the crucial need for mental liberation that fosters confidence, self-worth, and agency among colonized peoples. Fanon's assertion that the colonized must reclaim their identity is central to the broader discussion on decolonization, as it underscores the importance of mental and cultural emancipation as prerequisites for holistic healing (Mbembe, 2001).

Moreover, Oelofsen (2015) notes that contemporary socio-political movements across Africa and the diaspora serve as a testament to the increasing momentum for decolonization. These movements advocate for the transformation of educational systems, the integration of indigenous knowledge, and the promotion of cultural pride (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). For instance, the #RhodesMustFall campaign in South Africa has reignited conversations about colonial symbols in academia and the urgent need for structural changes that reflect African realities (Biko, 2016). This movement is a clear indication that decolonization is not merely a historical

requisite but an ongoing struggle that necessitates active participation from all sectors of society (Dei, 2000).

In conclusion, "Decolonising African Minds" represents a remarkable step towards healing that engages with the scars of colonialism while fostering a renewed sense of identity and purpose among Africans. This introduction lays the foundation for understanding the importance of decolonization as both a psychological and sociocultural phenomenon. With the continued exploration of indigenous knowledge, engagement with community narratives, and activism in educational reform, the decolonization movement opens pathways to healing that are necessary for an inclusive and equitable future. As we delve deeper into the findings of this research, it becomes evident that addressing the colonial legacies within individual and collective consciousness is essential for achieving true healing and empowerment across the continent.

Problem Statement, Implications and Relevance

The enduring legacy of colonialism has left deep psychological and cultural scars on African societies, manifesting in a distorted sense of identity and a reliance on colonial narratives that undermine indigenous knowledge and values (Rodney, 1982). Mahmood (1996) argues that the pervasive influence of colonial ideologies continues to affect various aspects of life, from education to governance, inhibiting progress and self-determination. Without a concerted effort to decolonize the mind, communities remain trapped in cycles of marginalization and disempowerment, making it imperative to address these issues for genuine healing to occur (Wane, 2013). Césaire (2000) highlights that the implications of failing to decolonize African minds are profound. Continued reliance on colonial constructs limits the potential for economic and social development, perpetuating inequalities and dependency. On the other hand, actively engaging in the decolonization process can lead to a renaissance of local cultures, empowering individuals to reclaim their identities and perspectives (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Rodney (1982) emphasizes that by addressing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism, African societies can foster resilience, promote cultural pride, and create pathways toward sustainable development.

The relevance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to a broader understanding of decolonization as a multifaceted process essential for healing and empowerment (Mbembe, 2001). Oelofsen (2015) argues that as Africa grapples with contemporary challenges, such as globalization and neoliberalism, decolonizing minds becomes increasingly critical for fostering a sense of agency and ownership over one's narrative and destiny. This research not only informs academic discourse but also provides actionable insights for activists, educators, and policymakers committed to promoting holistic and inclusive solutions for societal transformation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

This paper aims to critically examine the historical impact of colonialism on African identity and cultural narratives, highlighting the urgent need for mental decolonization. It further seeks to explore the role of indigenous knowledge systems in fostering resilience and empowerment within African communities. In addition, the study analyzes contemporary movements advocating for decolonization and evaluates their contributions to societal transformation and collective healing. Finally, the paper proposes practical strategies for integrating decolonial approaches into education and community engagement, with the aim of promoting holistic healing, cultural pride, and sustainable development.

Literature Review

The examination of colonialism's historical impact on African identity and cultural narratives reveals a complex interplay of oppression, resistance, and resilience that continues to shape contemporary African societies. Central to this discourse is the need for mental decolonization—a process that challenges ingrained colonial ideologies and fosters a renewed sense of identity and agency among African peoples.

Historical Impact of Colonialism on African Identity

Colonialism significantly disrupted traditional social structures, cultural practices, and belief systems across Africa. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), the imposition of colonial languages and education systems effectively marginalized indigenous languages and knowledge, leading to a disconnection from cultural roots and identities. This disconnection has contributed to what Fanon (1967) refers to as the "epidermalization of inferiority," a psychological condition wherein colonized individuals internalize a sense of inadequacy tied to their cultural heritage (Rodney, 1982).

The consequences of this historical trauma are starkly visible in the contemporary identity crises faced by many Africans. As asserted by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), the struggle for identity is deeply intertwined with the reclamation of indigenous narratives and knowledge systems that were systematically suppressed. This context underscores the necessity for mental decolonization, which requires not only the reclamation of cultural heritage but also an active engagement with history to craft empowering narratives that affirm African identities (Wane, 2013).

The Role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) play a pivotal role in fostering resilience and empowerment within African communities. These systems encompass traditional practices, healing methods, agricultural techniques, and ways of understanding the world that have been developed over generations. According to Dei (2000), indigenous knowledge is not merely a relic of the past but a living framework for

understanding contemporary challenges and possibilities (Okeke, 2025).

Research by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) highlights that the integration of indigenous knowledge into educational curricula and community practices can enhance cultural pride and social cohesion. For instance, Wane (2013) emphasizes that incorporating IKS into educational settings fosters critical consciousness among learners, enabling them to engage actively with their heritage. This engagement promotes resilience, as individuals draw on their cultural roots to navigate modern challenges, reaffirming the relevance of traditional knowledge in contemporary contexts (Rodney, 1982).

Contemporary Movements and Societal Transformation

In recent years, Biko (2016) notes that various movements advocating for decolonization have emerged across the African continent and the diaspora, fueling dialogues on cultural identity, policy reform, and social justice. The #RhodesMustFall movement, which originated at the University of Cape Town, highlights the demand for transformation in educational institutions that perpetuate colonial legacies (Achebe, 1984). As Biko (2016) argues, such movements challenge the status quo, calling for a re-evaluation of colonial symbols and narratives within academia.

These contemporary movements resonate with the broader decolonization agenda, emphasizing the necessity of reclaiming spaces for African voices and experiences (Appiah, 2010). They serve as platforms for articulating grievances and advocating for systemic change, linking historical injustices with modern demands for equity and justice. As highlighted by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015), these movements not only contribute to societal healing but also play a crucial role in redefining national narratives that validate African identities and aspirations.

In conclusion, the literature underscores the profound historical impact of colonialism on African identity and culture, illustrating the vital need for mental decolonization. By embracing indigenous knowledge systems and engaging with contemporary movements, African communities can navigate their path toward resilience and empowerment. The challenges posed by colonial legacies remain significant, but the ongoing efforts toward decolonization indicate a collective commitment to healing and transformation in African societies.

Theoretical

This study on *"Decolonising African Minds: A Remarkable Step towards Healing"* employs two pivotal theories: Postcolonial Theory and the Critical Pedagogy Framework. These theories provide a foundational lens through which to analyze the complex dynamics surrounding decolonization efforts in Africa.

Framework

Postcolonial Theory is instrumental in understanding the lingering effects of colonialism on African identity and cultural narratives. It critiques the historical and ongoing power imbalances established during colonial rule, emphasizing the need to dismantle these structures both in thought and practice. Scholars such as Said (1978) have highlighted how colonial discourses shape perceptions of the “Other,” necessitating a critical examination and reclamation of indigenous identities and narratives. This theory supports the argument for mental decolonization as a pathway to fostering self-identity and agency among African communities (Biko, 2016). By advocating for the affirmation of indigenous knowledge and perspectives, Postcolonial Theory underscores the necessity of recognizing and counteracting colonial legacies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

Critical Pedagogy complements this framework by focusing on the role of education in societal transformation and empowerment. Developed by thinkers like Paulo Freire (1970), Critical Pedagogy advocates for an educational approach that promotes critical consciousness and active engagement with societal issues. This framework emphasizes the importance of incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into educational curricula as a means to cultivate resilience and empowerment (Rodney, 1982). Clapham (2020) argues that by fostering an environment that encourages critical reflection and dialogue, educational institutions can serve as sites for reclaiming cultural narratives and promoting social justice. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive understanding of the processes involved in decolonizing minds, illustrating the interconnectedness of historical legacies, cultural identity, and educational reform as vital components of healing in post-colonial Africa (Diop, 1989).

Research Methodology

This systematic qualitative method sought to uncover the concept of *Decolonising African Minds: A Remarkable Step towards Healing*. Researchers adopted a structured approach, gathering and analyzing qualitative data from a wealth of online literature sources and expert opinions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). They meticulously selected 34 peer-reviewed articles spanning from 1972 to 2022, each discussing *Decolonising African Minds: A Remarkable Step towards Healing*. The data revealed the limitations of *Decolonising African Minds: A Remarkable Step towards Healing* (Pandey and Pandey, 2015). Plano Clark and Ivankova (2016) argue that the systematic approach ultimately provided valuable insights into the struggles and challenges faced within this domain. This careful methodology aimed to shed light on how external forces shaped these processes (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

As researchers such as Ivankova (2015) delved deeper, they found patterns that illustrated complex relationships governing these dynamics. Through the review of literature, the experiences of African traditions were navigated within challenging terrains shaped by policy implementation. The findings contributed significantly to discussions on *Decolonising African Minds: A Remarkable Step towards Healing* (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In reflecting on this research, it may inspire new conversations around governance, empowerment, and self-determination through the lens of decolonization (Pandey and Pandey, 2015).

Critical Discussions

The historical impact of colonialism on African identity and cultural narratives is profound and multifaceted, necessitating a critical examination of its enduring effects. Colonial rule not only disrupted traditional social systems but also inflicted psychological trauma that has reverberated through generations. The assimilation of African societies into colonial frameworks often involved the systematic denigration of indigenous cultures and practices, as articulated by scholars such as wa Thiong’o and Fanon. For instance, colonial education systems prioritized European knowledge while delegitimizing local languages and histories, leading to an internalized sense of inferiority among colonized peoples. This process, termed mental colonization, highlights the urgent need for mental decolonization, where Africans must reclaim their identities and narratives (Rodney, 1982).

Mental decolonization entails a conscious effort to rid one’s mind of colonial ideologies and to critically engage with historical narratives. An essential aspect of this journey involves redefining African identities on African terms, promoting self-affirmation through cultural pride, and challenging colonial constructs that persist in contemporary discourse. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) emphasizes that decolonization of the mind is both a psychological and cultural reclamation, allowing individuals and communities to reconstruct their identities apart from colonial legacies. This reclamation is crucial for healing, as it empowers individuals to confront and transform their historical traumas into narratives of resilience and agency (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). In exploring the role of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), it becomes evident that these systems offer vital resources for resilience and empowerment within African communities (Kwasi, 1995). IKS represents a repository of knowledge developed over centuries, encompassing traditions, healing practices, agricultural techniques, and ethical frameworks that resonate with the lived experiences of African peoples. Incorporating IKS into contemporary societal frameworks reaffirms the value of local wisdom and fosters a sense of belonging among community members (Etieyibo, 2018).

Dei (2000) argues that indigenous knowledge serves as a cornerstone for understanding not only individual lived experiences but also collective histories. In the face of globalization and the proliferation of Western ideologies, IKS enables communities to remain rooted in their cultural ethos, thereby fostering resilience against external pressures. For example, traditional agricultural practices adapted to local ecosystems can promote food security while honoring cultural heritage (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). The importance of integrating IKS into educational curricula further emphasizes the need for a transformative approach that empowers new generations with relevant skills and knowledge, as highlighted by Wane (2013).

Furthermore, Freire (1970) notes that contemporary movements advocating for decolonization demonstrate that the struggle is ongoing and multifaceted. Movements like #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall are emblematic of a broader global resurgence, wherein young Africans challenge systems that perpetuate colonial legacies within modern institutions. These movements serve as platforms for articulating grievances related to racial inequality, educational access, and institutional racism, effectively linking historical injustices with present-day demands for justice and equity (Falola, 2022).

Biko (2016) emphasizes that such movements are not merely reactionary; they possess the potential to reshape societal narratives and redefine what it means to be African in a post-colonial world. These movements advocate for a re-examination of educational policies, promoting inclusivity and relevance aligned with African experiences (Appiah, 2010). They also facilitate the formation of solidarity networks among activists, providing a grassroots approach to engendering change that reflects the aspirations of local communities (Emeka & Arinze, 2023).

Moreover, Hakim and Marika (2003) argue that the contributions of these movements toward societal transformation cannot be overstated, as they challenge hegemonic narratives and advocate for the incorporation of African perspectives. In doing so, they create spaces for dialogic engagement that allow for the intersectionality of various social issues, including gender equality, economic justice, and environmental sustainability (Kwame, 1970). They effectively facilitate a cultural renaissance that prioritizes African voices and experiences. It is evident that the repercussions of colonial rule persist, underscoring the importance of reclaiming identities and narratives (Etieyibo, 2018).

In conclusion, the critical examination of the historical impact of colonialism, the role of indigenous knowledge systems, and the analysis of contemporary movements highlights the necessity of mental decolonization in African societies. By fostering resilience through indigenous knowledge and

advocating for a transformative approach to education and activism, African communities can empower themselves to navigate the complexities of a modern world shaped by both historical legacies and contemporary challenges. The journey toward decolonization is not merely an academic endeavor but a vital step toward healing and societal transformation, ultimately paving the way for a future grounded in cultural pride, agency, and self-determination.

Findings and Recommendations

Historical Impact of Colonialism: The legacy of colonialism profoundly disrupts African identity and culture. Colonial rule has instilled a sense of internalized inferiority among Africans, exacerbated by the prioritization of European knowledge and the denigration of indigenous practices. This mental colonization emphasizes the urgent need for mental decolonization, which requires Africans to reclaim their identities and cultural narratives (Rodney, 1982).

Mental Decolonization:

Mental decolonization involves actively rejecting colonial ideologies and engaging with historical narratives to redefine African identities. This process is vital for healing, as it empowers individuals to convert historical traumas into narratives of resilience. Scholars like Ndlovu-Gatsheni affirm that this psychological and cultural reclamation is crucial for rebuilding self-worth and agency in African societies.

Role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS): Indigenous knowledge systems serve as essential resources for resilience and empowerment. By integrating IKS into contemporary societal frameworks, communities can reaffirm their cultural heritage and foster a sense of belonging. This knowledge encompasses agricultural practices, ethical frameworks, and healing traditions that resonate with the lived experiences of African peoples.

Contemporary Movements for Decolonization: Movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall exemplify ongoing efforts to challenge colonial legacies and advocate for social justice. These grassroots initiatives connect historical injustices to modern demands for equity while promoting inclusivity in educational policies. By redefining societal narratives, they amplify African voices against institutional racism and inequality.

Recommendations

Promote Mental Decolonization Initiatives:

Educational institutions should implement programs that focus on mental decolonization, reinforcing cultural pride and self-affirmation. Workshops, community discussions, and curricula that center local histories and perspectives can help individuals confront and reframe colonial narratives.

Integrate Indigenous Knowledge into Education:

Educational curricula must be reformed to incorporate indigenous knowledge systems. Teaching traditional practices alongside contemporary subjects can empower students with skills relevant to their cultural contexts, fostering a sense of identity and belonging.

Support Contemporary Decolonization Movements:

Policymakers should engage with and support grassroots movements advocating for decolonization. This involvement can take the form of funding, resources, and platforms for dialogue that elevate community voices and promote inclusivity in decision-making processes.

Encourage Interdisciplinary Dialogues:

Facilitate interdisciplinary dialogues between various social movements such as those focused on gender equality, economic justice, and environmental sustainability—to promote a holistic approach to societal transformation. This comprehensive view allows for a deeper understanding of how various struggles intersect, fostering solidarity and collective action.

Document and Share Best Practices:

Create platforms for documenting successful decolonization initiatives across Africa. Sharing best practices can provide valuable insights for other communities and enhance collaborative efforts toward social justice and cultural reclamation.

By addressing the enduring impacts of colonialism and implementing these recommendations, African societies can foster resilience, reclaim their narratives, and work toward a future grounded in empowerment and self-determination.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the call for “Decolonising African Minds” epitomizes a critical movement toward reclaiming African identities and narratives shaped by a painful colonial past. The discourse on decolonization has evolved, highlighting the importance of addressing not only the historical legacies of colonialism but also the psychological trauma that lingers within communities. By engaging with indigenous knowledge systems and fostering grassroots activism, individuals and societies can implement practical measures that promote cultural pride and empowerment. As evidenced by contemporary movements like #RhodesMustFall, the journey toward decolonization is an active and dynamic process requiring collective commitment to reshape educational and cultural landscapes. Ultimately, this ongoing struggle is essential for healing and forging a future that reflects Africa's rich heritage and diverse identities.

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