

An Act of Love: Three Experiences of Self-Decolonization in the Academic Community of the United Kingdom

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An Act of Love: Three Experiences of Self-Decolonization in the Academic Community of the United Kingdom

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This narrative essay presents testimonies that uncover the fragmented identity of members of minoritized ethnic groups in the academic context of the United Kingdom. It discusses outcomes of a project which, as part of an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) scholarship from the Doctoral School of the University of Salford, gathered testimonies and stories of international postgraduate doctoral researchers highlighting that the

process of decolonization should start from within. Demonstrating how deeply coloniality pervades lands and people, these narratives unveil realities of not fitting in, performing unconventionality, and placing marginalized voices at the forefront. The authors of this essay narrate their journeys towards recognizing their commitment to decolonizing themselves, and underline how this process can provoke change in others.

Keywords: autotheory, decolonization, dialogues, Global South writer, Indigenous, narratives, Western education system

In July 2022, the Doctoral School of the University of Salford advertised three Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) scholarships. One of them, 'Decolonizing research and the PhD,' funded this research project and brought its group of researchers (Keren Poliah, Hannah Helm, and David Junior Gilbert) together. The project aimed to highlight why decolonizing the self is important for postgraduate doctoral researchers studying Indigenous communities.

Our team chose to collect data through narrative interviews—a straightforward means to find out what people think (Stewart 1997). The method involves in-depth conversations allowing the researcher to inquire about interviewees' experiences. Narrative interviews enable participants to draw on their experiences, reflect on their past, and fully engage in the interviews in ways where they feel empowered to guide the conversation with the researcher (Beuthin 2014). Moreover, this is a culturally appropriate way of gathering knowledge from previously colonized communities (Barlo et al. 2021) that minimizes the power dynamics between the researcher and participants. In this study's case, the interviews felt more like friendly conversations that the interviewees guided by narrating their experiences in detail.

The narratives obtained from the transcripts were then inserted into this essay using the neonarrative method, which engages with the interpretation and description of as well as reflection on participants' perspectives (Barett and Bolt 2010). The process involves collecting data from interviews, sorting

the experiences into themes, planning where the narratives fit in the written piece, and understanding the topic by focusing on the knowledge gained from participants.

Two of the researchers interviewed here became part of minoritized ethnic groups the moment they landed in another country where they were no longer the majority. This precipitated their engagement with the issue of self-decolonization, but as their narratives emphasize, that process starts from within. These participants (also presented as this essay's co-authors) draw on Indigenous ways of conveying communities' truths and painful pasts throughout their interviews, using storytelling, testimonies, and dialogues. The essay is divided into three sections, the first focusing on my own (Keren Poliah's) journey to self-decolonization, the second presenting the testimony of the Nigerian writer and educator Vashti Suwa Gbolagun, and the third describing the experiences of John Yuen, a PhD student from Hong Kong.

Decolonization is an act of love

I do not remember exactly how old I was or what I was doing when I suddenly looked at my grandmother with teary eyes. *Mam (grandmother), I think my skin is very ugly. I don't like it,* I said.

*What don't you like about it, baba (my child)?
It's not pretty. It's brown.*

My grandmother removed her foot from the pedal and re-adjusted the needle on her sewing machine. *Give me your hand,* she said.

I placed my hand in front of her and she put my arm next to hers. Her slender fingers curled around my wrist, their oval nails of a burnt umber. Her gold wedding ring winked in the yellow light as she brought my hand under the pagoda table lamp. She placed my hand and hers on the purple sequin fabric she had cut, and we remained like this for a while. I do not remember how long the silence lasted, but it was long enough for me to notice that her skin looked exactly like mine.

Do you see this? She pointed at her hand. *It's the same as yours.* She moved my forearm close enough to hers, so that I felt her soft skin on mine. *If you say your skin is ugly, does it mean that mine looks ugly too?*

I looked at the hand that held mine, the forearm with the veins making their way to her elbow, the black beauty spot on her arm, and the chickenpox scar that left a hole below her shoulder. Her skin color was so magnetic, almost stealing the boldness of the lamp, fabric, and ring. I was surprised by my own skin emanating the same radiance next to hers. I shook my head. *No,* I said, *our skin color looks very pretty.*

My grandmother was a brown woman of Tamil descent, born in Mauritius to a father who abused her, prevented her from going to school, and forced her to work in his factory because she was not as fair-skinned as

her older sister, and he thought she therefore deserved less. I am also a brown woman from Mauritius, but I was loved by every member of my family, whether I was darker or not.

In 2017, I came to the United Kingdom on a student visa for my undergraduate course at the University of Northampton. I spent months settling down and was welcomed by everyone with the question of where I came from. The guesses ranged from 'Pakistan' to 'India' and 'Africa.' When I answered, some were surprised as they had never heard of the tropical island of Mauritius, while others silently processed their thoughts. Most of the time, the reactions culminated in my being asked whether Mauritius was '(still) a Third World country.' In these cases, the use of the term 'Third World' referred to a group of countries regarded as lesser and inferior to the Global North. At first, I defended my country from such assumptions: I maintained that our cities had tall buildings, my phone had internet, and that living in a coastal village did not mean that I jumped into the water at every opportunity. My undergraduate course started that September, and soon all acquaintances of distant relatives in the UK became aware that I was in their country with a scholarship from the Mauritian government as a reward for passing the national examination. This scholarship contributed to the assumption that I was smart, but poor.

Over the next three months, I was told by university peers to correct my accent, to abandon my religious practices, to go clubbing, and to start drinking, because: *Why else did you leave your country and culture?*

Being in the UK became a daily living test of the skills, qualities, and education I had acquired from my 'Third World African island.' I quickly lost the desire to argue with people who presented their biases about Mauritius, and I settled deeper into what Paulo Freire (2000) recognizes as the culture of silence. This culture of silence described my unspoken acceptance of what people thought and said about my home country. These conversations led me to believe that I knew nothing and should not speak out. My grandmother was no longer beside me to encourage a critical consciousness and a mind that appreciated my differences in this world where the legacies of colonialism were perpetuated. Yet, somewhere within my mind, the soft but powerful voice of my grandmother continued to echo: *They know we are special. That is why they chose to oppress us and to keep us under their feet. It is their fear of the unfamiliar, their thirst for power, and our silence that make these relations endure.* The culture of silence was a state of being I became increasingly familiar with—a state where I remained passive and suppressed within unequal social relations.

However, as I met people who were further along the journey of decolonizing themselves, I slowly began to reconsider my stance in this world. As Freire (2000) writes, 'in order for the oppressed to unite, they must first cut the umbilical cord of magic and myth which binds them to the world of oppression' (p. 175). This world of oppression had clutched at me back in my home country. It manipulated my actions and perceptions by oppressing my identity and making me want to trade my skin for one that I thought was prettier. Decolonization was still not a word with which I wanted to be familiar. When

educational institutions were challenged through the decentralized political and social Black Lives Matter movement (2013), the Rhodes Must Fall protests (2015), and the Why Is My Curriculum White campaign (2014), I did not yet question where I stood in this world or why I had always been standing there.

As soon as I started a postgraduate degree program, I sought out conversations with people who had managed to break their silence. As a doctoral researcher at the University of Salford, I joined the Minoritized Ethnic Student Collective, where Dr. Surya Nayak was sharing values and mantras helping students and researchers get through their struggles. One of those mantras, inspired by the African-American poet Audre Lorde, (2017) was 'Silence will not protect you.' This mantra sowed one of the seeds of my earnest interest in self-decolonization. As I attended the Minoritized Ethnic Student Collective meetings, I heard about the experiences and struggles of other postgraduates. When I understood the realities of the communities facing racist and imperialist ideas, I decided to engage in re-creating myself through an awareness of the painful past of others. I continuously engaged in conversations with others to foster empathic engagement and build my own commitment to decolonizing myself.

To me, decolonization became an act of love. As Freire (2000) so beautifully puts it, 'love is an act of courage'; 'love is commitment to others' (p. 89). The legacies of colonialism do not treat different minds, bodies, and lands with love and respect. Instead, these legacies lead us into recognizing some beliefs or practices as superior, inferior, or needing to change in order to fit the 'accepted' Western conventions. These legacies are part of why my grandmother's father felt more love for his fair elder daughter, why he cherished and protected her while making my grandmother feel inferior. My grandmother, even though she was not as literate as our society would have liked her to be, had a most humane and loving approach toward self-decolonization. On the day I told her I hated my skin, she created space for my mind to be silent for reflection. She let me become ready to listen, understand, and reflect on her words. This dialogue between us existed in the presence of profound love between a grandmother and her granddaughter.

The same love also exists between the people I met and interviewed for this narrative essay. Their stories are narrated here in the ways in which they were told during the interviews. This essay thus becomes a space for the interviewees to speak for themselves.

As part of my journey towards decolonizing myself, I inquired how my interviewees (whom I rather call friends) pursued their research, practice, and relations through a decolonizing lens. I initially approached my friends with my own understanding of self-decolonization, quoting Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird (2005): 'Decolonizing is the intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, lands' (p. 5). The conversation about decolonization flowed from academic thoughts to personal experiences as my friends explained what it meant to them. Through extracts from these conversations, the next two sections of the essay convey why decolonizing the

self is important to my friends. The embedded narratives demonstrate what they do to commit to this ongoing process that shaped their reflexive experiences.

We have all been molded differently

For the Nigerian writer and educator Vashti Suwa Gbolagun, decolonizing means a process through which she can honor her people and reframe their history. For her doctoral research, Vashti wrote a collection of autobiographical writings consisting of short stories and poems on the effect of tin mining on the Jos Plateau. She graduated in 2022, with her thesis providing a model for exploring alternative approaches to doctoral research. Throughout this section, the italicized words are spoken by Vashti (2023, personal communication').

My PhD wasn't the conventional type, as I incorporated my native languages and structured my thesis with the intention of talking about how the legacies of colonialism and their impact could articulate the experiences of my people. I wanted to contextualize my research findings to encourage people coming after me to write through their authentic selves without being subjected to the rigors of Anglo-centric conventions.

Through the process of re-inventing the thesis genre in order to create stories that connect her people to the land, Vashti had to decolonize herself in ways that Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith (2012) explains. Decolonizing the self involves 'processes for questioning the limits and possibilities of our own awareness, understanding what fills our minds and why, understanding our desires and fears and how they have been shaped, and being honest about the choices we make in terms of our engagements' with those who stand under the umbrella of white privilege (Tuhiwai Smith 2012: 198). As such, Vashti constantly reflected on her actions and thoughts to know what she should decolonize within her. This internal process was fueled as she turned to her native tongue to express herself. She felt strongly about using Pidgin and Hausa to take her thesis to another level of connecting with her people. *I had to be malleable for assessors, Vashti says, firm for my people, and know what I wanted to do to achieve those goals.*

Vashti was not content with only switching to Pidgin, as colonization did more than denigrate the languages she spoke: in fact, it colonized her mind, consciousness, and sense of being, as well as 'disrupted [the] fundamental senses of what constitutes life' (Tuhiwai Smith 2012: 198). Vashti had to overcome a crisis where she asked herself daily whether it was correct to go against the norm of conforming to the traditions of research practice. Because of the unconventional nature of her thesis, she felt the need to keep excusing the writerly decisions she was taking to portray the biographical narratives of environmental degradation as correlated to the stories of women going through rape and trauma in the colonial era. These topics were not easy to write about, but they were based on oral evidence of the extremely painful events Vashti's people had survived that she had gathered throughout her life. She remained in touch with her

roots through engaging with texts and theories by African writers; using the creative writing methodology of 'memory retention and collection' to make sense of oral stories; and appealing to elders by performing her poetry using the techniques of oral storytelling used in her community. The autobiographical and biographical testimonies in Vashti's research were forged from the voice of her decolonizing mind, thereby helping her people to follow in her footsteps.

As an African writer, Vashti fortified her commitment to others as she went through her struggles and thought of those who would come after her. *I am the seed for the people where I come from. I have been planted and will patiently wait until harvest.*

She worked towards leaving a legacy of hope and change for her people as she used storytelling as a tool to decolonize the self by representing their diverse truths (Tuhiwai Smith 2012).

For me, decolonizing means educating people about overcoming differences to cultivate a spirit of acceptance rather than a spirit of tolerance. I hope to educate my heart to better express what my people went through. I seek to educate my mind to better focus on the dialogues sustaining respectful relationships.

When she came to the United Kingdom, she strengthened her purpose of remembering the painful past of her people in order to connect the threads of history with experience. Her introspection brought her to connect minds, bodies, place, experience, trauma, and history. She sought to lift the silence which blankets families and individuals after traumatic events, when they are torn apart by the destruction brought on by colonialism. Since the Jos Plateau was opened up for tin mining and an influx of people came in, members of Vashti's community have suffered in numerous ways. People survived environmental degradation. People lost homes, animals, farms, and their own lives. Cancer rates—and death rates—rose. Women's implication by tin mining was overlooked, as they were thought to be the weaker sex who remained at home, when, in fact, they were raped, forced to bear the children of colonial masters, and prevented from speaking about what they were going through because it was deemed culturally inappropriate. There was a long silence after these traumatic events when the painful experiences were pushed into the background, erased from public memory, and disregarded. The scarcity of materials published and available on the challenges and lives of Vashti and her people meant that someone had to step forward to articulate the taboo in the name of those who no longer had a voice. Vashti believed that it is only after the taboo had been acknowledged and articulated that people could work towards breaking it. *I wrote for myself and others who [had] suffered, lived, and died*, she says.

Her writing explored issues in imaginative and critical ways that remained true to her people. As Tuhiwai Smith (2012) writes, Indigenous writers create texts for an Indigenous audience and 'seek to use language in ways that capture the messages, nuances and flavour of Indigenous lives' (p. 171). Intending to paint her pain and that of her people, Vashti found solace and strength in

disrupting the legacies of colonialism she had lived through by using Pidgin and Hausa. For her, using the native languages meant decolonizing herself, as the chains preventing her from speaking Pidgin and Hausa go back to her primary school days.

At my primary school, we were beaten and fined for using any languages other than English. I was forced to speak English and I had to speak it properly, otherwise I would be punished. Sometimes they made us kneel in the scorching sun and beat us with wooden sticks. This is one instance I always remember as back then I did not think anything of it; obedience to the Western ways was instilled from a very young age. But as I grew up, I looked back and wondered why I was made to behave as such and to abandon my native tongue.

To free herself and her people from the shackles of intellectual imperialism, Vashti was prepared to dismantle the imperialist perception that *nothing good comes from the colonized African countries, not even their language*. The revitalized use of Pidgin and Hausa in her thesis meant that these will be resources and examples for the generations, both old and new, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, across the world.

Unfortunately, years later, when her son was born and they settled in the United Kingdom, he went through an experience where his personal linguistic repertoire led to cultural bias and misunderstandings.

One day, my son needed to take medication as he had a headache. In Nigeria, we don't usually say 'I need to take my medication'; instead we'll use 'I need to take my drugs.' You can imagine what happened when my teenage boy went up to his teacher during classroom hours and said, 'Miss, can I take my drugs?'

The teacher was visibly shaken and asked for a confirmation. *Your drugs?* And the son naively repeated, *Yes, I need to take drugs*. This perceived act of an African boy having a strong impulse to take drugs and casually asking the teacher for permission caused a commotion. The teacher sought a colleague's support. They inquired into the cause for this impulsive and dangerous behavior, only to find out that there was a cultural misunderstanding, as the 'drugs' referred to were over-the-counter painkillers.

The situations that Vashti and her son faced in their school days exemplify intellectual imperialism. Years ago, Vashti was forbidden from using her native tongue at school; in the present, English views of Nigerians have not changed, as evidenced by teachers' racist assumptions about Vashti's son. Intellectual imperialism is a legacy of colonialism that is cultivated to maintain unequal relations and promote superiority of some races. As Syed Husseini Alatas (2000) writes, 'intellectual imperialism is the domination of one people by another in their world of thinking' (p. 24). One of the traits of imperialism is to keep Indigenous people under a form of tutelage where they are considered wards taught how to act, think, and speak in ways that are accepted by the colonial masters. Another trait is to dominate people by forcing them to conform

to a set of rules, ways of living and organizing their wider systems (educational, social, political, legal). These traits eventually make people feel embarrassed of their culture or identity as they face colonial hegemonic discourses (Gomes 2003). Vashti's and her son's language exist as part of the legacy of colonialism in Nigeria; it is an effect of intellectual imperialism encouraged by (former) colonial masters. Vashti was taught that her native languages would never be good enough to express herself and that adopting the language of colonial masters would lead her to a better way of living. In reality, these colonial masters' descendants continue to propagate the opinion that 'Africans' must remain under tutelage to become better people, presenting them as drug addicts (Kalunta-Crumpton 2008, Wanigaratne et al. 2009, Godkhindi et al. 2022).

We need to understand [that] people have different ways of being, thinking, and articulating. I strongly believe that there needs to be more than an apathetic and superficial understanding of our cultural differences. There is a need for a fusion of cultures so that one is not considered as superior to or better than another. We need to bring people back to the reality that we come from different backgrounds and are molded differently.

This *fusion* does not refer to the literal merging or displacement of cultures, but it accounts for what Alberto Gomes (2021) describes as follows: 'We must be prepared to learn *from* Indigenous peoples and not just learn *about* them for a better world' (p. 38, my emphases). Learning from Indigenous peoples is one aspect of self-decolonizing that can be achieved through educating ourselves via 'school and university curricula, media, blogs, social media, books, documentary films, art, theatre and musical performances, and public talks' (Gomes and Kundu 2021: 38) about Indigenous communities by Indigenous people.

Vashti challenged the traditional academic genre of the thesis as she engaged with decolonizing herself. Her thesis had initially sat in the discipline of literature until the practice of decolonizing led to auto-theory. Eventually, this transformed her project into a creative writing one, a significant shift that meant a change of her supervisory team. She was guided by creative writers who understood what she wanted to achieve, let her lead the research into her community, and were by her side to refine her work. Vashti and her supervisors engaged with auto-theory as a space which provided opportunities to reframe, redefine, rework, and reimagine the painful experiences of formerly colonized populations.

The practice of auto-theory enabled Vashti to acknowledge the presence of the 'I' in research and writing. As Lauren Fournier (2021) writes, auto-theory is a provocation, and it integrates the self with theory, particularly for 'women and people of color' (p. 5). By partaking in self-decolonizing and auto-theory, Vashti produced a unique autobiographical piece for her thesis. She stresses how helpful her supervisors were at polishing her work and guiding her towards the practice of self-decolonizing, creative writing, and auto-theory, which were new to her. The supervisors were dedicated to Vashti's aims and objectives. They accompanied her along her journey with dialogues,

empathy, understanding, care, patience, and love. In fact, Vashti's supervisors were involved with self-decolonization in ways similar to those that John Yuen describes in the next section when talking about his own experiences.

Our culture is not the fundamental law

One of the dialogues contributing to my understanding of self-decolonization and empathic engagement happened with John Yuen, Ka Keung, originally from Hong Kong. He is a counsellor doing his doctoral research on person-centered therapy in a Chinese community in Manchester. He is studying how counselling is conducted in the Chinese community and is looking at the generalizability of a Western-based counselling model when brought into a non-Western culture. His research journey contributed to various reflections on his practice, and above all, on decolonizing himself within his own community. Throughout this section, the italicized words are the testimony and stories spoken by John (2023, personal communication²). Born in British colonial Hong Kong before the 1997 handover to China, John describes himself as *Hong Kong Chinese*.

For us, we are completely immersed in Western culture. Hong Kong has more than a century of colonial rule, and the ruling class during this time were white. In a culture that respects hierarchy and seeks harmonious relationships, there is a strong sense to say, 'Yes sir, no sir,' to avoid open confrontation and conform to colonial expectations with the white ruling class. However, I am acutely aware of the expectation to not conform, speak out, and make yourself heard while I'm in the UK. Globally, Han Chinese is the largest ethnicity, with around 1.4 billion people, and I don't feel this conflict when I am with people from my culture. I don't feel unheard or unseen, and yet, it is only when I'm in the UK that there is a transformation taking place. I become this 'ethnic minority,' where I feel a palpable pressure to conform to expectations, constantly pushing back at caricatures of what an ethnic Chinese person should be. The more I try to explain who I am and where I stand, the more I find it difficult. And I see the need to decolonize [myself].

This struggle with identity is also seen in Alberto Gomes (2003), a Malaysian-born Australian of Goan Indian descent, who so eloquently explains that 'identity is not a zero-sum game where the attainment of one leads to the displacement of another.' Gomes (2003) mentions that the first aspect of his identity is his birthplace and the country where he grew up. Eventually, people receive a lot of cultural experiences from the places and countries that they live in and that form the background of who they are.

Similarly, John had the opportunity to observe his own cultural experiences and those of his colleagues when he worked in China, with Chinese people in a Western company. Understanding his position based on his identity and culture drove the way he acted and thought. His observations of one colleague made him realize further that conformity was always expected when faced to a Western culture.

This Chinese employee was targeted by the boss as not having the right attitude at work

because he was too humble, calm, and unassertive. Seeking to understand the mindset of that employee, I asked him: What would you say would make the perfect employee? And that employee's answer was: When your boss does something wrong, and you know it's wrong, to correct it without him knowing.

During our conversation, John proceeded to tell me the following: *I thought, 'Wow, that is Chinese!'* There is this difference in thinking that John found difficult to put into words and yet, he understood his colleague's urge to behave that way. However, his Western boss was unsatisfied with that behavior because the employee was not assertive and speaking out during meetings. The irony here is that the colleague was being assertive by not conforming to the boss's expectation of what a good employee should be and insisting on following his cultural beliefs even if this meant he was to be punished for doing so. In other words, he was being assertive in the 'wrong way.'

Like that employee, many individuals choose to behave or think in a certain way because of their cultural experiences and differences. They are told that their ways are not acceptable or that they simply do not know how to do anything correctly. Syed Farid Alatas (2007) expounds this as a case of ethnocentrism, where individuals or groups are judged as per the standards and categories of another, dominant culture. In the case John observed, the Western boss judged his Chinese employee according to his own Western standards, which he considered to be better. This makes John ask the following:

If I say someone's ways are wrong, then from which perspective am I saying this? Because within that person's cultural context, they are right. We encourage this assumption that we are right even though we are looking at the world through a specific lens and with a different worldview than others.

John explained his practice of self-decolonizing as an interrelated process of (a) self-reflection on our past behavior, (b) cultivation of understanding, and (c) self-awareness. He argues that we need to put ourselves at the very center of critical self-reflection when we start the process of self-decolonizing. Upon reflecting on our past behaviors, we need to ask ourselves: *Do I want to understand someone's culture and differences, or do I want a version of who they are tailored to my understanding?* Answering this question allows us to notice whether we are ready to step into a space where we realize that our culture is not the fundamental law. The next leap is to recognize that our way is not the only way to be.

The whole purpose of decolonizing is that we can understand things and perceive others beyond our own cultures. Understanding your own culture is fundamental to cultivating the ability to understand other people's cultures. This has been an important learning from my current research because I often held the assumption that people already understood their own culture [and are therefore able] to understand the issues or appreciations I raised about mine. The problem is that, in the Global North, there isn't much understanding of other cultures. Of course, I'm generalizing, but I don't walk down the road expecting people

to understand China or the cultural differences in Hong Kong. People have previously asked me, 'What?! Can you get coffee in China? Isn't it a Third World country?' And I assume that it is the same about Mauritius. If you speak about Mauritius, we only think of holidays, the sun, sand, and sea. But that is not everything that the country is about.

Self-awareness is a process that makes people ready to perceive existing differences between their own and other cultures. John recalled his experience at a university in Hong Kong where he spoke in English and everyone else at the university was expected to switch to English when they spoke to him. This led him to realize how there was a lot more understanding and acceptance of English culture and Western ways in other countries of the world; in contrast, it is quite rare to meet people at a UK university who understand and speak Chinese.

The people who are more along the process of understanding their own culture have more of the ability to understand other people's cultures. Understanding an 'other' culture requires an awareness of one's own culture, cultural biases, privileges, cultural inability to set aside stereotypes, prejudices, racist and imperialist thoughts, and anything else that is in the way of accepting someone's differences.

This awareness of our world and who we are allows us to perceive others and bridge the divides leading to empathic engagement.

Ramón Grosfoguel (2013) writes that 'the Westernized university is basically reduced to that of learning these theories born from the experience and problems of a particular region of the world [...] with its own particular time/space dimensions and "applying" them to other geographical locations even if the experience and time/space of the former are quite different from the latter' (p. 74). This epistemic privilege accorded to Western countries is what pushed John to decolonize himself. His dialogues and exchanges of thoughts with others (and internally) lead to the realization that the assumed inferiority of some worldviews is a legacy of colonialism. It is essential that decolonization reaches the core of our self as we ascertain what makes us who we are and strive to recognize the value of the world in which others live.

Opening the gates and being willing to go through them

In his interview, John Yuen expressed that decolonizing cannot be a one-way process where it is down to us to explain and do everything for others to understand. It also requires our interlocutors to be willing to try to understand what exists outside their world. If we simply establish the gates of our world and wait for decolonization to happen, it is not going to work. It is by opening the gates and being willing to go through them that decolonizing happens. Vashti mirrored this thought, stating that there will be many hurdles, but we owe it to our ancestors and the future generations to commit to decolonizing. Like my friends, I (Keren) believe that our commitment to decolonizing ourselves is a

lengthy, ongoing process full of obstacles. What fuels my passion is the love that my grandmother instilled in me and that I believe we can all cultivate for ourselves, others, and this world.

In our endeavor to decolonize, the participants of this research project are co-authors. Staying true to decolonization and to Indigenous community values, we believe that participants should not only be acknowledged and thanked in the acknowledgements section. These narratives would not have existed without the co-authors; thus, to show our appreciation for the journey, experiences, and differences of everyone whose emotional truth forms part of this essay, we share this piece as our co-creation.

As presented in this essay, there are numerous processes to engage with self-decolonization. I (Keren) take a peaceful and empathic approach since I view decolonization as an act of love and care for others. I believe that by caring for others and creating a space for them to express themselves like in this essay, we can engage in dialogues which will lead us towards decolonizing the self.

For Vashti, the practice of self-decolonizing means that she becomes aware of her limitations and steps out of existing colonial thoughts. She connects to her roots and reflects on whether the Western practices learned in academic institutions are really appropriate for studying a non-Western culture. This process implies challenging the Anglo-centric PhD while remaining patient and dedicated to writing about the painful experiences of formerly colonized populations.

John's interview emphasizes the dedication and rigorous questioning required to decolonize the self and become self-aware of our own cultural stereotypes and biases when viewing other cultures. Research, studies, dialogues, and works about decolonizing oneself are continuously created every year as decolonizing remains an ongoing process.

In fact, we might not truly know whether we have decolonized ourselves completely or not, and if this is possible to achieve in our postcolonial capitalist society. Still, we researchers strongly believe that we can hope to understand the process and commit to it simply as an act of love towards ourselves and others.

1. Gbolagun VS (2023, 12–26 May) Personal communication, online interview, EDI Lead Decolonizing research project.
2. Yuen JKK (2023, 15 May) Personal communication, online interview, EDI Lead Decolonizing research project.

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