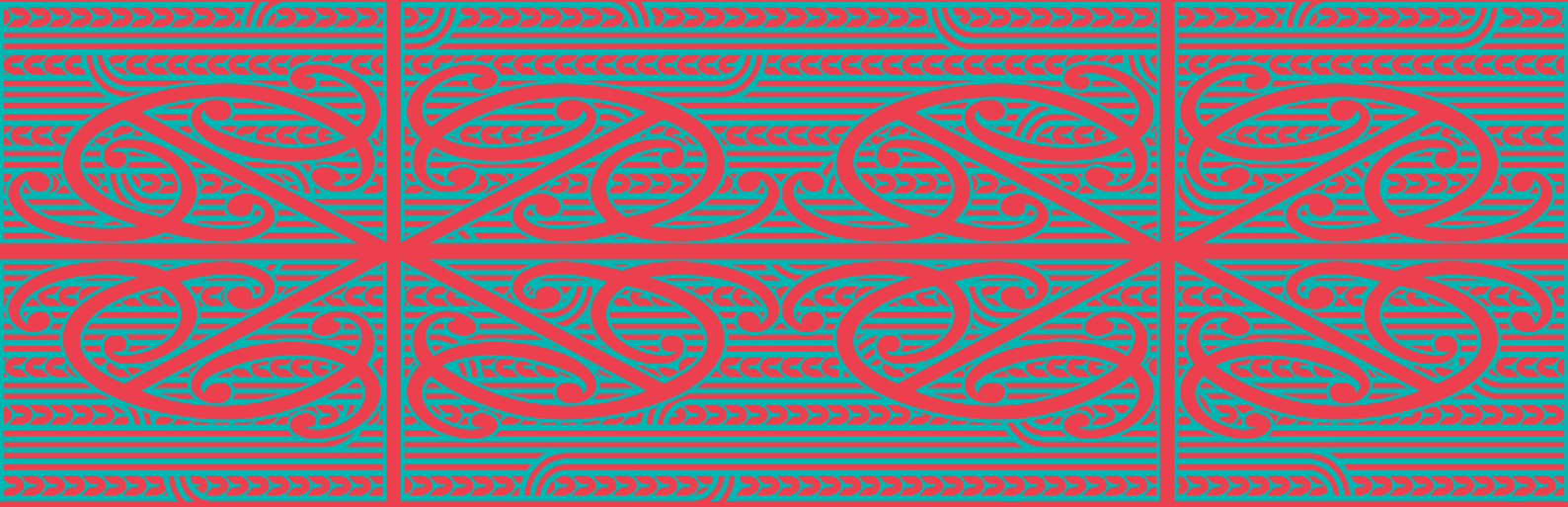


Definitions and uses of the term “decolonisation”

A brief overview of key literature

Georgia Palmer and Nicola Bright



Rangahau Mātauranga o Aotearoa NZCER
Te Pakokori
Level 4, 10 Brandon St
P O Box 3237
Wellington

www.nzcer.org.nz

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He kupu whakataki Introduction

“In the end, decolonization simply means having faith that we can still be brave enough to change an imposed reality”—Moana Jackson (2018, p. 2)

Decolonising education is a strategic priority for Rangahau Mātauranga o Aotearoa NZCER. Kairangahau have been exploring how we can contribute to decolonising education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In the early stages of this work, it became clear from internal discussions that collectively we needed to gain a deeper understanding of the term “decolonisation” and its application to educational research. We decided to conduct a rapid review of key literature in the field both to educate ourselves and to share our findings with the educational research community.

This paper explores the origins of the term “decolonisation” and its various definitions within the literature, and it gives some examples of contemporary usage. In this paper we privilege the work of Māori and Indigenous writers who have paved the way for the ongoing work of decolonising education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We hope that researchers who are on similar journeys to understand their relationship to, and role in, decolonising education find this short paper a useful introduction to what is a much larger, ongoing kōrero.

He aha te tikanga o te kupu “purenga ihomatua”? What do we mean by “decolonisation”?

The word *decolonisation* has become popular in education research, but it is a loaded term with historical, political, and moral complexities. Different groups have varying opinions of, and objectives for, decolonisation as a concept. The concept of decolonisation emerged in the 19th century (Shahjahan, et al., 2022). It gained traction and nuance in the decades following World War 2 in African contexts (Betts, 2012), and when countries such as Indonesia in 1949, Samoa in 1962, Fiji in 1970, and Vanuatu in 1980 fought for the “literal removal of the colonial power from the colonised nation state” (Mercier, in Elkington et al., 2020, p. 48). In Aotearoa, the concept of decolonisation rose to prominence in the late twentieth century with a focus on dismantling colonial systems and ways of thinking that negatively impact Māori, the Indigenous people of this whenua. Graham Smith (2003) says that, for many Māori, this was a result of a shift to a more proactive mindset: “a shift away from waiting for things to be done to them, to doing things for themselves; a shift away from an emphasis on reactive politics to and an emphasis on being more proactive; a shift from negative motivation to positive motivation” (p. 2).

Te tautuhi i te purenga ihomatua Defining decolonisation

Much of the literature drawn on for this paper contains references to three seminal texts about decolonisation. The first is *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) by Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist, political philosopher, and Marxist, Frantz Fanon. Fanon discusses the dehumanising effects of colonisation, and the importance of liberation, independence, and freedom of the colonised from the coloniser.

The second is *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) by Māori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Smith encourages researchers to “decolonize our minds, our discourses, our understandings, our practices and our institutions” (2021, p. xiii). The third is by the Brazilian educator and advocate for critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire. His *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) (written in Portuguese, first published in Spanish in 1968, and in English in 1970) promotes transformation of the structures of oppression to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor.

Colonisation is defined by Moana Jackson as the “violent denial of the right of Indigenous peoples to continue governing themselves in their own lands” and an ongoing “process of dispossession and control” (in Elkington et al., 2020, pp. 133–134). Decolonisation exists in opposition to colonisation and has been defined in different ways depending on country and context.

Tuck and Yang (2012) (who position themselves as an Indigenous scholar and a settler/trespasser scholar) highlight the different views of decolonisation articulated by Frantz Fanon and Paulo Freire. They write that “Fanon positions decolonization as chaotic, an unclear break from a colonial condition that is already over determined by the violence of the colonizer and unresolved in its possible futures” (p.3). In contrast, Freire’s position is one of “liberation as redemption, a freeing of both oppressor and oppressed through their humanity” (p. 20).

Indigenous North American scholars Wilson and Yellow Bird (2005) define the end goal of decolonisation as liberation. They explain that decolonising strategies can support Indigenous communities in challenging the “current power structure” while strengthening and preparing for the “long struggle toward complete liberation” (p. 4). They state that:

Decolonization ultimately requires the overturning of the colonial structure. It is not about tweaking the existing colonial system to make it more Indigenous-friendly or a little less oppressive. The existing system is fundamentally and irreparably flawed. (Wilson & Yellow Bird, cited by Mercier, in Elkington et al., 2020, p. 4)

In Aotearoa, Māori writers Jackson and Mercier (both in Elkington et al., 2020) argue that decolonisation is a method applied to aim for an equitable co-partnership and co-governance system that provides better outcomes for all rather than to gain complete independence from the government. We explore this idea further in the remainder of this paper.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi: Tō tātou horopaki ahurei i Aotearoa **Our unique context in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Our context in Aotearoa New Zealand is unique because of the relationship between the Crown and Māori set out in Te Tiriti o Waitangi (1840). In addition, traditional Māori knowledge systems are still alive and thriving throughout whānau, hapū, and iwi, despite the long-term, negative impacts of colonisation for Māori (Hutchings & Lee-Morgan, 2016).

Within a Tiriti o Waitangi partnership between Māori and tangata Tiriti (in one sense, non-Māori who honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi), Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent) have a significant role to play owing both to sheer numbers and to historical agency in colonisation. According to Mahuika (2015), decolonising “is not just about Māori empowering ourselves, but is ethically vital for Pākehā in finding a way beyond the colonizer position” (p. 14).

For Māori writer Kiddle (in Elkington et al., 2020) the negative impacts of colonisation affect all, not just Māori.

Thomas has explored Pākehā perspectives of decolonisation, arguing that decolonisation for tangata Tiriti looks very different, and encouraging Pākehā to engage in decolonisation.

One of the things that makes people Indigenous is that they have no other homeland to return to. That means Pākehā are not Indigenous—our ancestors came from somewhere else, and that place is our other homeland. But for those many, many Pākehā who see our future in Aotearoa and not back in the countries our ancestors come from, the only way to legitimise our place here is to do the work that flows from being tāngata Tiriti, people who are committed to a Treaty relationship. This work involves thinking about how we came to be here, questioning relationships of power and control, and engaging in decolonisation. (Thomas, in Elkington et al., 2020, p. 117)

Within this body of work, concerns are also expressed about the potential to re-colonise. Therefore, it is also important to understand that colonial methods cannot be used to decolonise. In a play on the words of Andre Lorde, Linda Tuhiwai Smith cleverly writes: “The master’s tools of colonization will not work to decolonize what the master built. Our challenge is to fashion new tools for the purpose of decolonizing and Indigenous tools that can revitalize Indigenous knowledge” (2021, p. 22).¹

This is why mātauranga Māori and Māori concepts are key in the process of decolonisation.

Ngā tikanga whakaako pure ihomatua i te ao mātauranga Decolonising methodologies in education

The Aotearoa New Zealand education system emerged from colonial settlement as a tool to assimilate the Māori population into a European-dominated society. Recent research suggests that the education system still acts as an ongoing method of oppression on the Māori world that negatively impacts the wellbeing of Māori. This system has been described by Pihama and Lee-Morgan (2019) as “destroying and diminishing the validity and legitimacy of Indigenous education, while simultaneously replacing it with an “education” complicit with the colonial endeavor” (p. 20). According to Bright et al. (2021) the system was, and to an extent still is, “a powerful instrument of colonisation, actively deterring the use of te reo Māori in schools and assimilating tamariki Māori into a monolingual and monocultural environment” (p. 4).

The following quote by Smith describes the dual focus required of researchers to both decolonise and indigenise knowledge within education:

The challenge for researchers of decolonizing methodologies as a set of knowledge-related critical practices is to simultaneously work with colonial and Indigenous concepts of knowledge, decentring one while centring the other. (Smith, 2021, p. xii)

Words and concepts such as indigenisation, reMāorification, restoration, conscientisation, or consciousness-raising are heard paired alongside or used instead of decolonisation. Some argue that these terms are more appropriate than “decolonisation” as they decentre the coloniser, by literally removing any mention of colonisation from the word itself, while still describing the act of decolonisation (Smith, 2003, and Hokowhitu, 2011, cited by Mercier, in Elkington et al., 2020, p. 70).

A common strategy for Māori researchers working towards decolonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand is to use mātauranga Māori frameworks and kaupapa Māori methodologies to centre te ao Māori. Some Māori historians see decolonising methodologies as essential to understanding our history because they decentre the Eurocentric histories predominantly taught in schools, and centre Māori narratives

¹ Smith (2021) sources this from, (1979).

(Mahuika, 2015; Kaa, 2021). According to Mahuika, mātauranga Māori includes “tikanga approaches that enable historians to support the kaupapa of empowerment and decolonization” (p. 14). Lee-Morgan and others have explored the curating and sharing of pūrākau (traditional Māori stories) as a decolonial practice. Lee (2009) defines pūrākau as: “a collection of traditional oral narratives that should not only be protected, but also understood as a pedagogical-based anthology of literature that are still relevant today” (p. 1). Jackson emphasises that decolonial discourse here in Aotearoa is distinctive due to pūrākau already encompassing decolonial ideologies and writes that this knowledge can be found throughout the precolonial stories of the land:

...if people care to listen, such stories still seep through the land. Many of them were first told and learned in the long centuries when Māori became iwi and hapū, and long before those who were called the rerekē or ‘different ones’ arrived on these shores. (Jackson, in Elkington et al., 2020, p. 136)

The connection between Māori and the land is written in the name tangata whenua—people of the land. The detrimental effects of land loss are multilayered and intergenerational for Māori, negatively impacting physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing (Jackson, 2018, Mutu, 2015). Tuck and Yang (2012) consider the reclamation of ancestral land to be decolonial work, and we have pondered what the role of education might be in assisting with this goal in Aotearoa. Is it to educate people about the history of the land and colonisation to increase support for social justice, which includes return of land to Māori? Is it nurturing a connection between learners and the land through local curriculum? At a minimum, pūrākau and other decolonising methodologies gift us with the foundations for a future where Māori identity and connection to this whenua are understood and supported by all.

He kupu whakakapi Conclusion

Colonisation and decolonisation go hand-in-hand, and by applying the concept of decolonisation we immediately challenge the “norms” brought about by colonisation. Discussions about decolonisation can be unsettling, and some may prefer to use alternative words to avoid the discomfort that the acknowledgement of colonisation carries. However, it is worth sitting with this discomfort in order to explore possibilities that will undoubtedly emerge.

In this paper, we have identified two main definitions of decolonisation from the perspectives of Indigenous groups: i) decolonisation is complete liberation from colonial power; and ii) the co-partnership of Māori and non-Māori working together to dismantle colonial oppression.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Tiriti o Waitangi provides a tūāpapa (foundation) to work together as Māori and non-Māori to decolonise education. There is space for non-Māori to do this work, as long as it is done with Māori leadership, and a commitment to power sharing and relinquishing privilege.

This brief overview of the literature barely scratches the surface of what it means to decolonise education and we acknowledge that there are many other Māori and Indigenous views that are not included here.

However, if we know in our hearts that a non-colonising Aotearoa is a future we collectively want for our tamariki, then choosing to take on a decolonial-focused mindset is where the work begins. We finish here by posing three questions for readers to contemplate:

1. What does decolonisation mean to me?
2. What is my role in decolonising education?
3. What are my aspirations for how Māori and all others can live together in Aotearoa as Tiriti o Waitangi partners?

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