



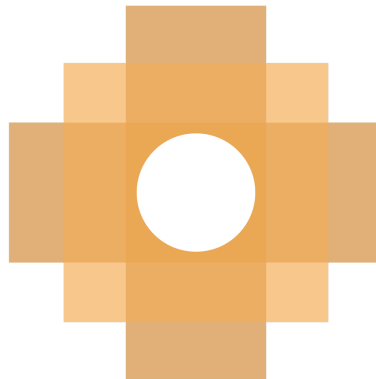
Imagining the Post-Colonial Christian University

Information and Discussion Guide

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Contributed to the:

Stott-Bediako Forum



**Peace Building and Conflict Transformation
from a Lens of Postcolonialism and Indigenous Christianity**

by INFEMIT



Imagining the Post-Colonial Christian University

Historically, universities have been projects of Euro-American thought. They were the original institutions that trained the clergy, politicians, and leaders who rationalize(d) and legitimize(d) coloniality. Even those that champion indigenous identity and knowledge can be complicit in research models, knowledge production and curation, pedagogy, and education that can perpetuate colonialist tendencies.

Nevertheless, higher education throughout the world has been a site of resistance to coloniality. For example, much of the original movement derives from South African higher education. Further, many scholars and practitioners who are committed to decolonizing work earned their degrees at the university!

So, is there such thing as a university that is postcolonial or decolonized? Is there such thing as a Christian university/college/seminary that is postcolonial? If so, what might it look like? Is it something that Christians in education should aspire toward?

The accompanying video and resources might help us as a global group of Christians committed to decolonizing theological knowledge and experience to consider the role of the university in postcolonial Christianity. These resources are primarily written to and from the university; there is an important irony in this! Please note that these resources derive from my own experience and connections in the field. I welcome and desire your contributions that enhance, challenge, and protest what follows!

I. On the Role of Knowledge in Colonialism

Through research, universities are known for “producing” or “discovering” knowledge. For example, conducting empirical research systematically values the “collection” of data through extraction of knowledge. When I want to research something, I conduct interviews or focus groups or surveys, converting people to datapoints to extract “findings.” Both “knowledge extraction” and the “disembodiment” that occurs through converting communities and people to stories and numbers on a page can reinforce coloniality. Many students and faculty assume a position of being the knower.

Questions to Consider:

- What kinds of knowledge have been valued by the university?
- What kinds of “knowledge production” or “research” might constitute a decolonized Christian university?
- Can the university ever engage indigenous knowledges without a power imbalance?



Written Resources to/from the University:

- ❖ Leigh Patel (2016). *Decolonizing educational research: From ownership to accountability*. *Routledge*.
- ❖ Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999/2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. *Zed Books*.
- ❖ Norman Denzin, Yvonna Lincoln, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008). *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*. *SAGE*.

II. The Role of Teaching in Colonialism

Like in a museum, professors choose what stories, facts, and experiences to pass along to the next generation. Through teaching, the university or seminary selects *whose* stories are worthy to share. “How” educators educate can also reinforce colonialist tendencies. One-way lecturing, for example, can mirror imperialist power. Even more progressive “experiential education” can mirror knowledge and resource extraction.

Questions to Consider:

- What other forms of “teaching” might constitute decolonized education?
- In what ways can highly educated people “learn” from/about indigenous knowledge?



Written Resources to/from the University:

- ❖ bell hooks (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. *Routledge*.
- ❖ Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

III. The Role of Service in Colonialism

Traditionally, the university has been an institution that purchases land, builds buildings on that land, and then trains students to “go and serve” those on the margins through business, societal leadership, and politics “for the common good.” As many have argued, however, discourse about decolonization often relies about the benefactor’s benevolence, or those in a position to do the work of “decolonizing.” But, decolonization without repatriation of indigenous land and life.

Questions to Consider:

- How might the university repatriate indigenous land and life? What successful attempts at reparations have you encountered?
- Can universities be sites of emancipation? Are they inherently gatekeepers of knowledge?



Written Resources to/from the University:

- ❖ Tuck and Yang (2012) Decolonization is not a metaphor.
- ❖ Chatterjee and Maira (2014). The imperial university: Academic repression and scholarly dissent. University of Minnesota Press.

IV. Sparks of a Postcolonial Imagination

Part of the task of decolonizing work is developing a different imagination. Currently, university engagements with indigenous knowledge, life, and land may be best understood in the following typology. Indigenous structural change refers to the level of structural change within the university: Is it structurally—in terms of organization, relationship to land, etc—the same as the university has been for centuries? Indigenous presence refers to the level of indigenous life, land, and knowledge at the university. This typology was developed primarily for Christian university leaders in the United States to better situate their relationship to indigeneity.

Typology of university-indigenous engagement

	Lower Indigenous Presence	Higher Indigenous Presence
Lower Indigenous Structural Change	<p>TOKENISM</p> <p>Non-existent; institutions are not thinking about reparations; occasional token or spectacle programming; characterized by beliefs about the past</p>	<p>INCLUSION</p> <p>Compositional diversity; regular conversation or programming related to indigeneity; a higher amount of indigenous voices in curriculum, but little institutional commitment or structural change to repair indigenous relations</p>
Higher Indigenous Structural Change	<p>ACKNOWLEDGE</p> <p>Perhaps an academic center or an endowed chair in indigenous theology. The anthropology department. Land acknowledgements.</p>	<p>REPAIR</p> <p>Significant infusion and/or repatriation of indigenous language, events, networks, culture, land.</p>

Other existing resources at universities around the world may shape what a postcolonial university may entail. **What examples have you encountered?**

- Aotearoa indigenous center at University of Waikato: <https://www.waikato.ac.nz/study/subjects/maori-and-indigenous-studies>
- University of Hawai'i indigenous center: <https://manoa.hawaii.edu/hshk/kamakakuokalani/>
- NAITTS: <https://www.naiits.com/>