

What is shaping culture? Decolonisation

 By Brett Rogers 15 Mar 2021

Decolonisation is about forming new ways of thinking that relate to everyone. This allows us to hold many different viewpoints from different cultures within our country and foster a fresh viewpoint that all the country can align with and benefit from.

It's taken us a very long time to come to terms with the fact that colonisation has had a detrimental impact on nations and cultures that have been imposed upon by it. It's taken us even longer to realise that decolonisation is not a dirty word but rather an opportunity for all of us to grow and develop as artists, philosophers, parents, educators, scientists, politicians and most of all as human beings.

The impacts of colonisation can't be undone but culture will evolve and be re-established as we incorporate indigenous structures and knowledge and should, over time, reduce the intensity of those impacts.

Africa and South Africa have been under colonial rule for so long that institutions, learnings, religion, science, politics, family dynamics, history and more have washed over our own understandings, learnings and philosophies. Colonial systems are so deeply ingrained that we couldn't even see that they are not our own.

The conversation about addressing that has now begun, with historians revising our understandings of historical events and peoples. People are reclaiming their personal ancestral identities, stories, triumphs and knowledge. Artists are speaking directly to colonialist practices and norms, finding a way to speak out against colonial structures.

23%
OF SOUTH AFRICANS USE
ENGLISH/AFRIKAANS AS
THEIR HOME LANGUAGE.

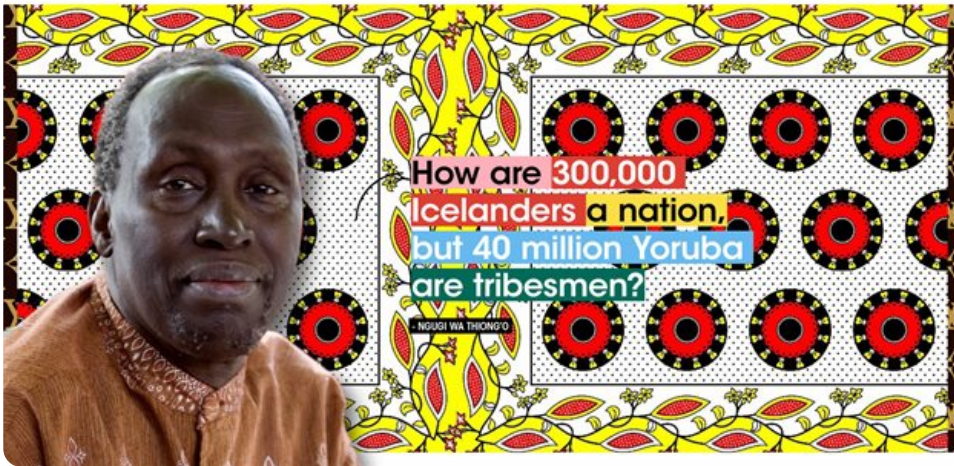
100%
OF SOUTH AFRICANS ARE EXPECTED
TO GO THROUGH SCHOOL LEARNING
IN ENGLISH/AFRIKAANS.

"I always loved
South African
languages, but I
was forced to do
Afrikaans at school.
I wanted to learn
Swati. I chose Zulu
because doing
hip hop music for SA
in English is not on."

- COSTA TITCH

Language is one of the first impacts on culture. Imagine that you had to learn throughout your entire schooling career using a language that was alien to you. Do you speak a second or third language? Now, think about how that would impact your success at school? This is precisely what we are asking of 78% of the children in this country. We complain about terrible results and shameful numbers of kids reaching and then matriculating. Yet we are failing them by not providing a multilingual schooling system.

Costa Titch, whose quote we feature here, is no saint; he is simply doing what is a healthy future-focused way of engaging with the world. South Africa's approach to first and second language education leaves me disenfranchised and reminded of the evils of colonialism and apartheid.



Art, too, is a vital cog in the wheels for and against colonialism. We spoke to Luxolo Witvoet, a powerful young artist, about a particular artwork of his called 'Re-Appropriate' showing a meta reimaging of an image of Picasso showing off a piece of his work. This is what Luxolo had to say:



Picasso is one of the world's most celebrated artists. I don't think anyone will come close to him, his name is synonymous with the word art. His style was heavily inspired and influenced by African art and he was famous at a time when African people didn't have the voice or the power to "appropriate" their own work. The artists at that time created spiritually and culturally, and not for monetary gain but in the west art was already an industry.

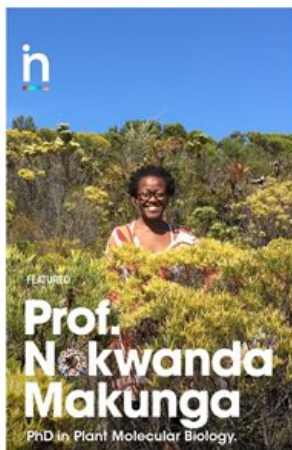
Picasso was a white man sampling and remixing African art through his own perspective and genius, however he was in a position where he could have paid homage to where his own wealth came from... so by re-appropriating, I am taking back that power.

I'm trying to show where western art comes from, by taking Picasso's image and letting him show us where his inspiration came from.



Re-Appropriate

One of the prime areas that we can consider decolonisation is education and medicine. Western science and medicine is notoriously close minded to "other/indigenous" knowledge. Dr Nokwanda Makunga spoke us about the benefits of IKS - Indigenous Knowledge Systems, which are still limited in their adoption throughout our country.



Local knowledge is very deep but not regarded as being 'scientific' by some in many quarters but utilisation of plants provides clues to efficacy and safety when they have been incorporated into traditional medicines. This information is passed on through oral histories but is forever changing to meet contemporary medicinal health needs.

There is a growing interest in South African Indigenous Knowledge (IKS) because of the many varied ethnopharmacopoeias that exist in South Africa that are linked to a nation with abundant diversity in flora and fauna. The international community also understands that there is significant biocultural diversity that is associated with different people that live in SA. This positions us in a different space internationally.

SA has a strong research ethos for doing internationally relevant research and the amount of articles linked to natural products research and IK has seen an exponential increase post-apartheid. All of these aspects are fuelling a growing interest in the 'knowledge of our grandmothers' as much work in medicinal plant research and natural products specially that emanates from SA has a strong connection to this knowledge.

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In our podcast, we spoke with Dr Valentino Alily about the delicacies of the subject of decolonisation and how misunderstood the word is. We'll close out this article with this statement from the doctor:

“For most of us there is a misconception that decolonisation has to do with the breaking down of entire western structures and ways of thinking. That is the challenge we have had, trying to work out what decolonisation is all about. The solution is to understand that decolonisation has to do with integrating afrocentric cultural ideologies with western concepts.”

ABOUT BRETT ROGERS

Brett Rogers, culture lead at Cape Town advertising agency HaveYouHeard and content curator for In_, a channel of content, which showcases cultural forces that are changing the world. It aims to inform, inspire and entertain the viewer and does so with multimedia posts, including podcasts, videos, google trends, mini Q+A's and more. in_ talks to those interested in in-depth cultural exploration and those curious about the world we live in.
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