

DECOLONIZE YOUR MOVEMENT HANDBOOK



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Decolonize your movement

If you have picked up this handbook and are reading this, it means wherever you are in your political journey, you have some interest in the work of decolonization. Three of us who have worked on this handbook have tried to provide the readers a map of the work of decolonization that they can explore as much or as little as they like. In whatever political work you are doing, and whichever context you are in, we hope that with the help of this handbook can approach the work of decolonization more easily.

But to begin with, what do we mean by 'the work of decolonization'?

We live in a world that has been shaped by the process of colonization. In this process European civilization played the role of perpetrators. Spain, Portugal, France, England, Belgium and the Netherlands have significant history of colonizing vast parts of our world. Other European countries like Germany, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and eurasian countries like Turkey, Latvia and Russia also had colonies.

Even though it's been more than 45 years since the last colony was freed - the impact of colonial exploitation is still very much present today in our societies and in power relationships.

Therefore, **the work of decolonization means to identify, actively challenge and change the narrative, power relationships and societal dynamics** that still exist today as a continuation of colonial exploitation.

While doing this work, it is important to understand that- we are not romanticizing the colonized countries. Any political activist approaching the work of decolonization needs to have the understanding that not all the challenges and problems of the previously colonized countries are a result of colonization. But the history of every country in the world has been significantly influenced and shaped by the process of colonization. Without understanding that impact and having that lens to analyze the current dynamics, we will fail to capture the full truth. And it is important to understand the full truth because only then can we influence and shape a different future that unshackles from our collective oppressive history.

In the next few pages we share from our own experience and collective learning what are the steps to do the work of decolonization, point to some of the resources that exist out there and provide a framework with which this work can become more sustainable.

We have outlined this handbook by answering some questions. These were the questions we felt were the key to embarking on this journey. We can not answer all the questions by ourselves. Some of it would be answered by you. There will be new answers to the questions we tried to answer. Also there will be new questions that need to be asked.

Q1: Why is it important to decolonize?

We have started this handbook by asking what do we mean by decolonization, and while discussing that we have touched a bit on why it is important. As we want to build a future that is just for all, we need to understand the current characteristics of different forms of oppression that we see around us. When we dig into it a bit deeper **we would see many forms of oppression that we see around us today-** e.g. racism, classism, justifying certain forms of economic systems and processes as 'developed' **has its roots in colonial history.**

Unless we understand that dynamics, make it visible, we can't effectively dismantle these oppressive patterns and make new ones. We might come up with solutions that still extend on colonial narrative and repeat old patterns. That is why it is important to do the work of decolonization.

Q2: How to do the work?

Unlike the mainstream western way of thinking that there's only one right way to do everything- we want to emphasize that there is no one way to do the work of decolonization. There are many ways to approach the work and understand it. Such as —

Decolonization as a praxis

Decolonization as a healing process

Decolonization as a bodywork

We believe that it is important to explore the understanding of decolonization in many different ways. Society is a complex system and the

process of colonial exploitation has impacted our societies in multifaceted ways. It shows up in individual relationships to employee relations in multinational companies. It varies differently in different geographic regions. The discussion and work of decolonization is different in North America than in Europe than in the Indian subcontinent. Therefore, the most important work is to hold that multiplicity while approaching the work of decolonization.

Secondly, the discussion of decolonization today takes place as part of continued legacy. In power dynamics, in analysis, in social relations remnants of colonialism show up. And only then it becomes relevant to bring the discussion of decolonization. If in our relations, organizing structures and systems there were no relation to colonial power dynamics today we would not need to talk about decolonization.

Thirdly, the work of decolonization needs to go hand in hand with current ongoing fights. Into present organizational structures. Into the proposed solutions. We have to embed the work of decolonization in the current discussions and use the lens to ensure that, while we are fighting for energy justice, indigenous rights, food justice - we are also doing the work of decolonization.

Keeping these points in mind, while approaching the work of decolonization the **following generalized steps might be helpful** —

1. **Seek out resources, learn about colonial history and discussion of decolonization:** It is absolutely mind blowing how little we know of the

history of colonization considering how much it still affects us today. Only when you actively seek out and start reading you will start seeing its impact in the present day more and more clearly, and the relevance of doing this work. The first and most important step is to learn about colonial history. An easy way could be to start with your area of interest or geography of interest.

2. **Build an understanding of colonial roots of your current fights:** try to find - if any- your current ongoing fight has colonial roots. E.g. if you're working in health worker's rights- seek out to understand if there's any interconnection between the health worker's rights in a country and colonial history of that country.
3. **Identify how colonial legacy shows up in your organizational structures/movement analysis/interpersonal relationships and what impact it has**
4. **Find other like minded people and create a space inside your organizational structure to talk about it**
5. **Come up with an annual/bi-annual/quarterly or monthly work plan:** collectively decide on what actions you want to take inside your organizational structure to challenge and change (if any) colonial patterns. It can be white supremacist culture that shows up through some individuals in the leadership. It can be the unaccounted privileges that new activists are not aware of. It can be organizational spaces not being safe enough for black, indigenous or people of color activists. Whatever it is that you might have identified in step 2 and 3, create an action plan to change it collectively with other comrades who joined you in step 4.

6. Create space for care, love and empathy: The work of decolonization can be hard and exhausting. Often the people who are close to you can change when challenged with their internalized colonial mindset. Moreover, the history of colonialism is brutal and the unaccounted injustice can make one feel cynical at times. Once you learn more, you might end up seeing continued colonial relationships in many unexpected spaces. Therefore, it's also important to create a space to nurture the love and tenderness inside and remember why we are doing this work in the first place.

Q3: What to keep in mind?

The work of decolonization first and foremost is work of love, work of reclaiming humanity and freeing our collective history of insurmountable injustice. We can not win by closing our hearts. We can't win if we operate from a place of anger, bitterness and pain. The work of decolonization is fundamentally our work of collective healing. We must never forget that.

Here we want to share these lines by Gloria E. Anzaldúa from her book *Acts of Healing* — “The paths we’ve traveled on have been rocky and thorny, and no doubt they will continue to be so. But instead of the rocks and the thorns, we want to concentrate on the rain and the sunlight and the spider webs glistening on both. Some of you, like us, are up to here with the chorus of laments whose chief chant is “I’m more poor, more oppressed than you,” who give suffering and pain more merit than laughter and health. And yes, we intimately know the origins

of oppression; it brewed in our beds, tables, and streets; screaming out in anger is a necessary stage in our evolution into freedom, but do we have to dwell forever on that piece of terrain, forever stuck in the middle of that bridge?"

When we do the work of decolonization, we believe that we don't win by falling into the victim narrative and victim mindset. We have seen instrumentalisation of decolonial narrative. Anti-racist structures being abused and work of decolonization being blamed to destabilize groups. The world is complex and so are social movements. We need to be brave to be able to talk about harmful practices and strategy in the movement. We need to be collaborative and open to strategize together and build long term change.

Q4: What are the limits of the decolonial lens?

Like most other analyses, decolonization underlines one aspect of human history and its impact today. This is not the end to all, or 'The One' tool that can provide all answers. This is a powerful one, and a very important one. For the movement of climate justice it's even more important as without it the understanding of the climate crisis would be incomplete. Therefore any solution put forward as well be ineffective or would lead us down the wrong path.

Keeping that in mind, we need to acknowledge that the need for decolonial work is far from over. As we undertake the complex task of undoing different

forms of oppression that's embedded in our social, economic and political systems, a continued work of deep decolonization is absolutely critical.

Q5: What is next for the decolonization movement?

In the past years in Germany, specifically in the climate justice movement the discussion of decolonization has taken a prominent place. We have seen panel discussions and workshops taking place in small and big organizing spaces. Inter connected solidarity action being organized in many different movements.

We have also experienced networking and collective discussion among anti-racist groups and climate justice groups. Since 2019, when the first ever BIPOC climate justice conference was organized, there's been a conference being organized each year till 2022.

There are more resources being channeled to BIPOC lead groups and higher awareness about decolonization. On one hand, with these changing situations new challenges are coming up, and more maturity in some parts of the movements can be observed. On the other hand, the larger population is still out of touch with the discussion and are either experiencing terrible racism or perpetuating racism in their everyday life in Germany. Which means the need to have a coordinated effort to raise awareness around the issue of continued colonial legacy and dismantling it is needed.

We hope this handbook can provide a primary guide for different movements to take up that task, and start having conversations to build a broader network and strengthen each other with shared learnings.

BIPOC Climate Justice Network

The network came together in 2019 when a small group of activists decided to organize the first ever BIPOC Climate Justice Conference in Germany. Originally planned to be an in person event, the conference had to move to a virtual format due to covid. In the online event more than 80 people and 15 self organized groups joined over a two days programme. From the conference the need to have a network of individual activists and diverse BIPOC collective became clearer.

Tonny Nowshin, Juan Donoso and Dodo were part of the initial group of people who used their power of rage and love into making the dream of BIPOC climate justice Conference in Germany come true. They have come together with their diverse experience, brilliant minds and beautiful hearts to create this handbook. If this resource makes the decolonial work even a bit easier and joyful for you, that'd make this collaboration meaningful.

www.bipoclimatejusticenetwork.org

European Youth for Action

European Youth For Action (EYFA) is an environmental youth network in [Europe](#). It is based in [Amsterdam](#) and has partner organizations in 18 European countries.

<https://eyfa.org/>

