



# decolonizing THE internet

Whose Knowledge?  
Summary Report, 2018

## **Decolonizing the Internet**

Summary Report

October, 2018

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With inputs from participants.

Designed and laid out by Claudia Pozo with Free Software: Inkscape and Scribus

WHOSE KNOWLEDGE?

*We are a global campaign to center the knowledge of marginalized communities (the majority of the world) on the internet.*

<https://whoseknowledge.org/>



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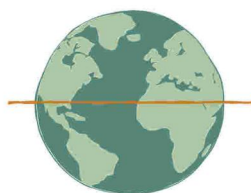
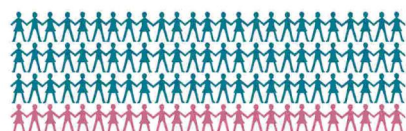
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# WHY THIS CONFERENCE?

## THE HIDDEN CRISIS OF UNKNOWING

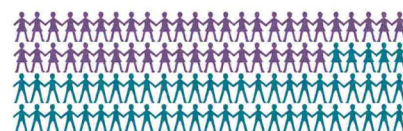
Over 50% of the world is online today[1], but the internet doesn't represent our diversity. In 2018, we know that 75% of the world's online population is from the global South[2], and 45% of all women in the world are online[3].

**75%** OF THE WORLD'S  
ONLINE POPULATION



IS FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

**45%** OF ALL WOMEN IN THE  
WORLD ARE ONLINE



Yet, if we look at public knowledge online – as exemplified by Wikipedia, the fifth most-visited website in the world – it is written primarily by white men from Europe and North America. Only 20% of the world edits about 80% of Wikipedia's global content currently[4], and we estimate that 1 in 9-10 of Wikipedia editors self-identifies as female[5].

ONLY **20%** OF THE  
WORLD POPULATION



EDITS ABOUT **80%**  
OF WIKIPEDIA'S GLOBAL CONTENT



What's happening online is only replicating many of the exclusions and erasures of the offline world. Only a fraction of the world's knowledge systems are captured formally in books or other forms of visual and oral material, and the internet – for all its democratic, emancipatory potential – further skews what we use as knowledge every day.

For example, only about 20% of published books are freely accessible in the public domain and 10-15% are in print, according to Google research[6] conducted in 2010. In a world of 7 billion people speaking nearly 7000[7] languages and dialects, we estimate that only about 7% of those languages are captured in published material. A smaller fraction of the world's knowledge is converted into digital knowledge, and an even smaller fraction of that is available on the internet.

[1] <https://wearesocial.com/us/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018>

[2] <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

[3] <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2017.pdf>

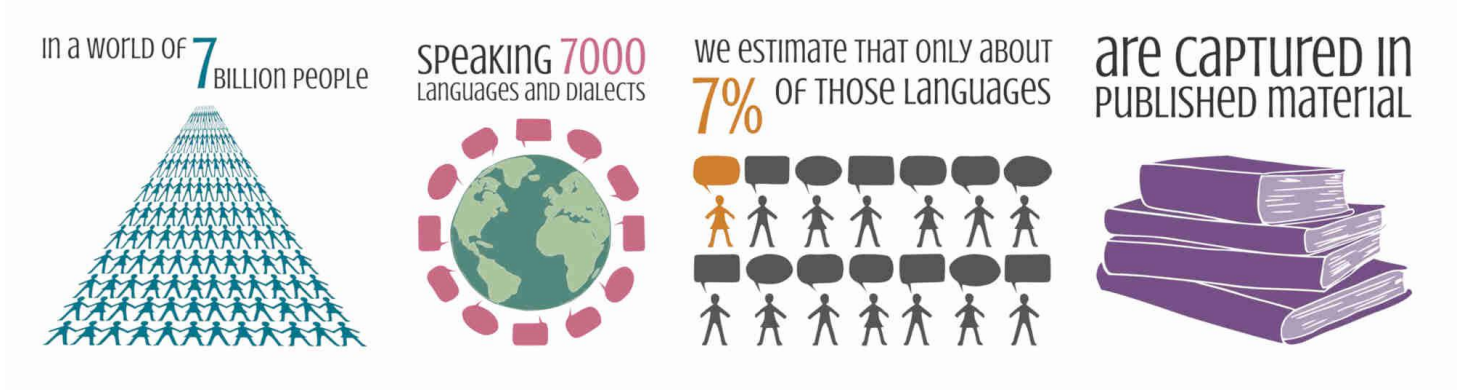
[4] [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Key\\_theme\\_-\\_Global\\_South,\\_WMF\\_Metrics\\_Meeting\\_February\\_2015.pdf](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Key_theme_-_Global_South,_WMF_Metrics_Meeting_February_2015.pdf)

[5] <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0065782>

[6] [https://www.pcworld.com/article/202803/google\\_129\\_million\\_different\\_books\\_have\\_been\\_published.html](https://www.pcworld.com/article/202803/google_129_million_different_books_have_been_published.html)

[7] <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/how-many-languages-are-there-world>





**We believe that the internet should be challenging the biases of the offline world, not deepening them.** The knowledge of marginalized communities is the knowledge of the majority of the world. Yet most online public knowledge still skews towards white, male, and global North knowledge. It is a hidden crisis of our times.

## CONVENING DECOLONIZING THE INTERNET

This hidden crisis of “unknowing” – that we do not adequately know each other, our histories and knowledges well enough in a rich, diverse, multilingual, multicultural world – is at the core of many other crises of violence and injustice in our world. Many of us remain unseen and unheard, and this is made worse when our histories and knowledges are missing online. And because this is such a big and complex problem, we know that efforts to re-imagine the internet, and knowledges on it, will require a multitude of us working together across difference contexts.

So the idea for Decolonizing the Internet was born: a two-day space in July in Cape Town in which unusual and unlikely allies – people who come from different domains of expertise but who each think about knowledge and the internet in their own contexts – came to meet, talk, and scheme together about how to bring more plural forms of knowledge onto the internet!

We wanted to open up a space for discussion, dreaming, and direct action on these critical issues in a space with real impact. So we hosted Decolonizing the Internet as a pre-conference for Wikimania, the Wikimedia movement’s annual conference, where the South Africans’ theme this year, with support from Whose Knowledge?, was ‘Bridging Knowledge Gaps: The Ubuntu Way Forward.’[8]

[8] <https://blog.wikimedia.org/2018/02/05/wikimania-cape-town-ubuntu/>

# WHAT DID WE DO?

How we work is as important as what we do. Decolonizing the Internet was cultivated as a space for discussion and connection, so we moved away from a colonizing conference format of *talking at*, toward a conference environment in which everyone is *talking with*.

First, we situated ourselves in time and place by recognizing the land and its history.

we're deeply grateful to be here  
with you, land of the Khoisan  
whom we honour and thank  
for this space.  
Enkosi kakulu!



Whose Knowledge? Co-Directors Anasuya Sengupta and Siko Bouterse welcomed participants to the conference, reflecting on how this is a conversation that we've all been waiting for.



You can listen to the full audio here: <https://w.wiki/5Wt>

*"At #DecolonizingtheInternet today. The room is packed with a diversity of bodies on a diversity of coloured beanbags. Siko & Anasuya open the space by locating themselves as colonisers and the colonised" - @jhybe on Twitter, 18 July 2018.*



So, we decided to hold this space, this Decolonizing the Internet conversation, because at the core of Decolonizing, is the process of talking about power and privilege - about whose stories get told, whose faces get seen, whose bodies and ideas are protected, and whose are not. And through this deconstruction of power and privilege, to create some really powerful, radical new ways of knowing each other and of being with each other.

And we know that this conversation cannot happen without the centering of the leadership, the ideas, the bodies, the minds, the souls, the hearts of marginalised communities, and the allies who support each other.

And we also want to move from thinking together to doing together - so these two days are really designed to build ideas but move towards actions together.

And, once again, it feels so right to be having this conversation in Cape Town, about decolonizing the Internet. For all of us around the world, southern Africa has been such an inspiration from the anti-apartheid movement to the much more recent, fiercely, radical, student-led movements of decolonizing. We thank you for that inspiration.

We are feeling both a sense of urgency, and a real sense of emergence, of possibility - because we know that in the movement between the online and the offline, we can create spaces and actions that help us to decolonize together.

In the 50s there was a remarkable, extraordinary march in Pretoria by 40 thousand South African women and girls. June Jordan, the American poet, wrote a very powerful poem that ends with the lines that many of us might remember in honour of this extraordinary, fiercely, bold protest: "We are the ones we've been waiting for". We think every generation has the ones we've been waiting for, but one thing we do know: "this is the conversation we've been waiting for". Thank you for being here to have it with us.



The whole conference was built on three core beliefs and principles: **love, respect, and solidarity.**

Together with our fantastic feminist facilitator from Cape Town, Shamillah Wilson[g], we designed the two days to cultivate love, respect and solidarity in our words, actions, and even our furniture!

*"Everything matters when you're trying to unseat power...including where how and with whom you sit. Loved the beanbags which were all about active talking and spatial equality - we disrupted power by talking, sharing our experiences, and building out from them." @busydot on [Twitter](#), 29 July 2018*

*"Very comfortable seating at #DecolonizingTheInternet :) I love the informal and relax atmosphere here!" - @protoplasmakid on [Twitter](#), 18 July 2018*

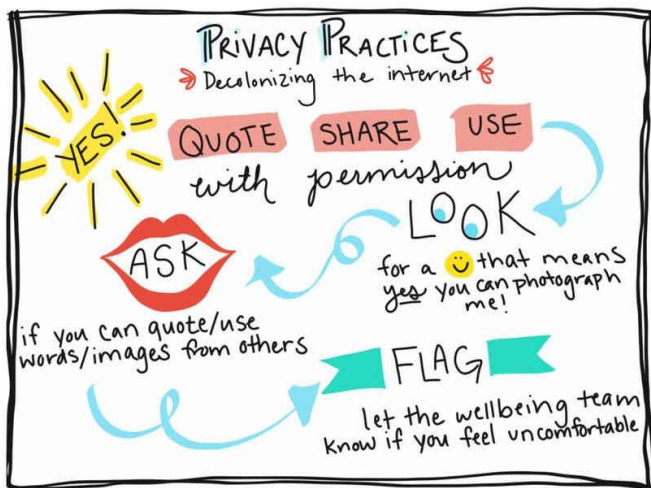
*"@WhoseKnowledge's Decolonizing The Internet Conference just started and it's already one of the best conferences I've ever attended in my life. Also, all the chairs are bean bags, chyle. Giving me life!" -@mckensiemack on [Twitter](#), 18 July 2018*

We wanted to create a comfortable space for people to share their experiences, insights, and knowledge. So we needed more than beanbags. The conference included a quiet room for reflection and personal space as well an art space for participants to explore the themes visually with markers, crayons, and colored pencils. These small spatial interventions made a big difference when it came to decolonizing the traditional conference format.



[g] <https://shamillahwilson.com/>





In addition, we had **clear privacy practices** to ensure everyone felt safe to be seen and heard.

We also had a **wellbeing team** who served as our 'love, respect and solidarity keepers,' on hand as a first level of support for any issues or frustrations that came up along the way.

The wellbeing team and our ground rules of love, respect and solidarity were a layer we created in addition the standard

Wikimedia friendly space policy<sup>[10]</sup>, which was also in place to protect attendees.

And we had **group facilitators** to support the discussion process and help the organizing team make adjustments in response to participant needs and interests over the two days.

Discussion groups throughout the two days were asked to take turns sharing roles of discussion facilitator, scribe, and love/respect/solidarity keeper for each conversation, so that circles of trust and responsibility continued to expand.



Image by Tinaral, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons.



Image by Heykc, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons.

Image by Protoplasmakid, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons.



Image by Tinaral, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons.



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[10] [https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/Friendly\\_space\\_policy](https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/Friendly_space_policy)

Finally, at the beginning of the second day, we made time in plenary to hear from some South African participants about their own situated experiences around colonization and decolonization.



Image by Tinaral, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons.



Image by Heyko, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons.



Image by Tinaral, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons.

## WHO PARTICIPATED

Participants at Decolonizing the Internet came from all over the world and brought many diverse perspectives and experiences to the discussion. Because this was our first time organizing this event, we hand-selected each participant, aiming for a strong balance that centered people from marginalized communities while including trusted allies.

As a result, a total of 96 fellows participated of Decolonizing the Internet, and of these sets of people, 67% were women/non-binary/transgender, 68% came from countries from the global South, and 77% were people of color. The wide array of the participants' fields of expertise added to the depth of the debates and brought richness and variety of perspectives to the conference. Some backgrounds of the participants included community organizers, archivists, advisors, artists, activists, wikimedians, scholars, academics, librarians, funders, technologists and media workers.

a TOTAL OF **96** FELLOWS PARTICIPATED OF DECOLONIZING THE INTERNET

OF THESE SETS OF PEOPLE:

**67%** were women/  
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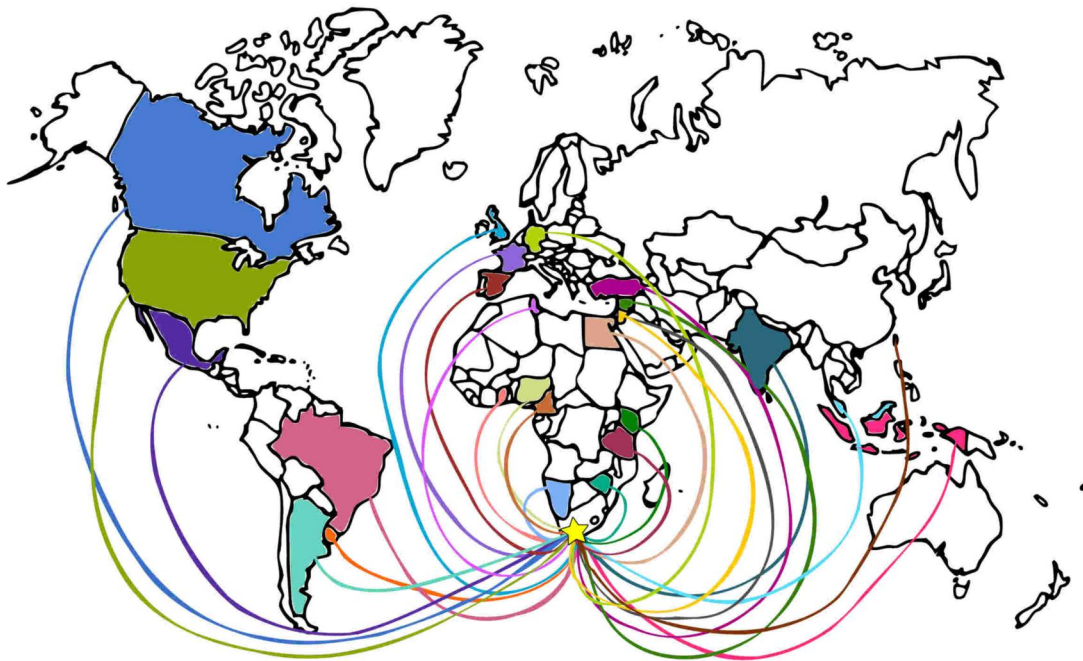
**68%** came from  
THE GLOBAL SOUTH

**77%** were PEOPLE  
OF COLOR

*"When someone says " We can't find"diverse" participants There are 95 people in this room 67% women/GNC, 68% Global South, 77% POC #decolonizetheinternet"  
-@blackamazon on Twitter, 18 July 2018*

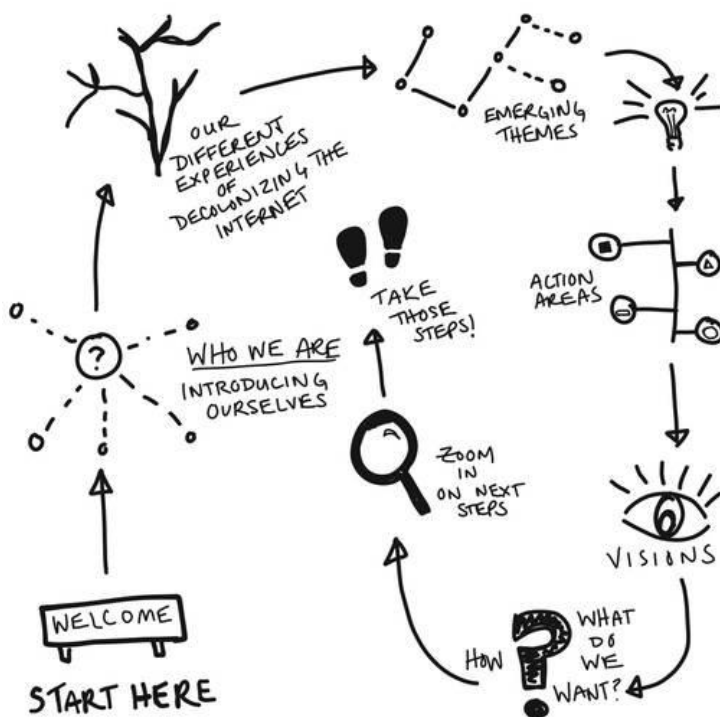


DECOLONIZING THE INTERNET PARTICIPANTS CAME FROM **28** DIFFERENT COUNTRIES!



ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, CAMEROON, CANADA, EGYPT, FRANCE, GERMANY, GHANA, INDIA, INDONESIA, ISRAEL, JORDAN, KENYA, LEBANON, MALAYSIA, MEXICO, NAMIBIA, NIGERIA, SOUTH-AFRICA, SPAIN, TAIWAN, TANZANIA, TUNISIA, TURKEY, UK, URUGUAY, USA, AND ZIMBABWE

## WHAT WE DISCUSSED



The agenda<sup>[11]</sup> for the two days was focused on posing big questions and leaving space for imaginative answers.

### DAY1 - BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS, UNCOVERING THEMES TO EXPLORE TOGETHER

- Who is here? What are we excited about?
- What are our experiences of decolonizing the internet? What does decolonizing the internet mean to you?
- What themes are emerging?
- What is one action or issue area we hope to see move forward?

[11] <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bnZml2M7fHUgYch8Rm3XXf5JXJtQCPJE5Nml6lgGG8/edit>



## DAY2 - DEVELOPING ACTION AREAS AND NEXT STEPS

- What are the action areas we want to work on?
- Where are we going and what could it look like?
- How do we get there?
- What's one next step?

We began the second day with a discussion around decolonization in the context of South Africa, led by local speakers who shared their experience and perspectives on recent movements engaged in processes of decolonization, including #RhodesMustFall and #FeeMustFall. Thanks to Dumisane Ndubane, Sarah Summers, and Shamillah Wilson for their insight and eloquence, connecting us to the local struggles for recognition and freedom in South Africa.



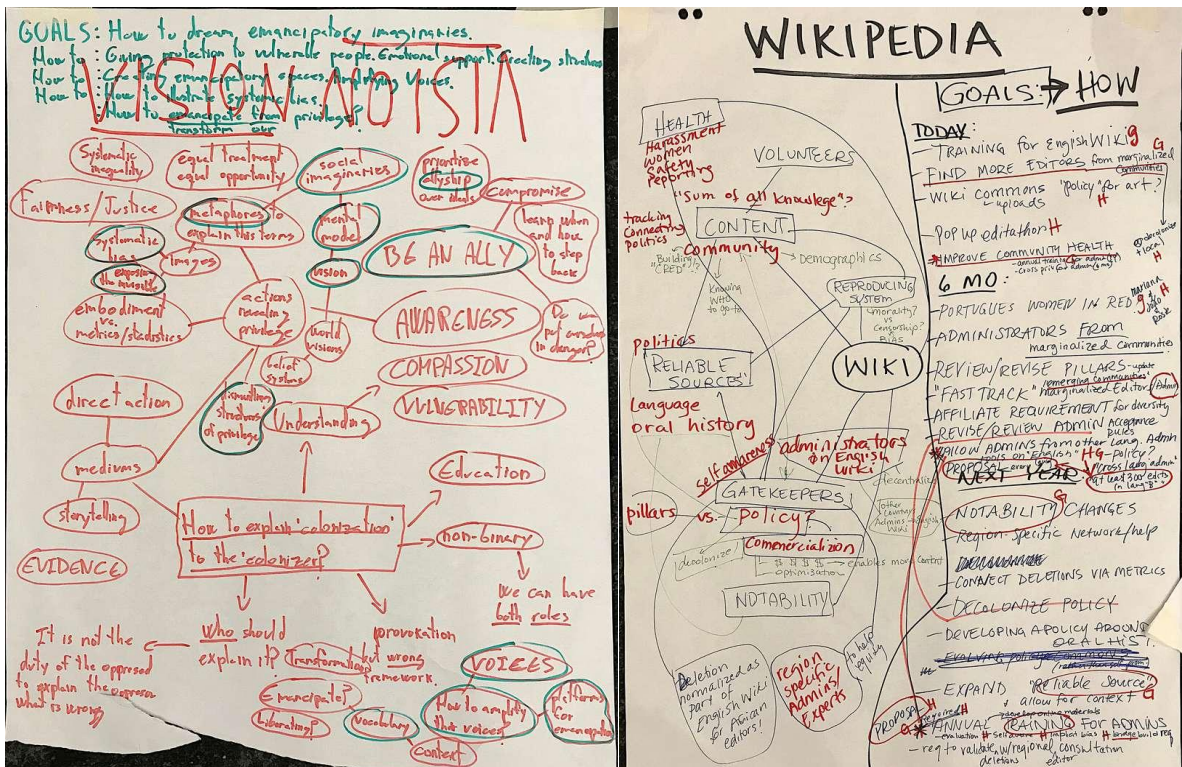


# EMERGING THEMES, VISIONS AND GOALS

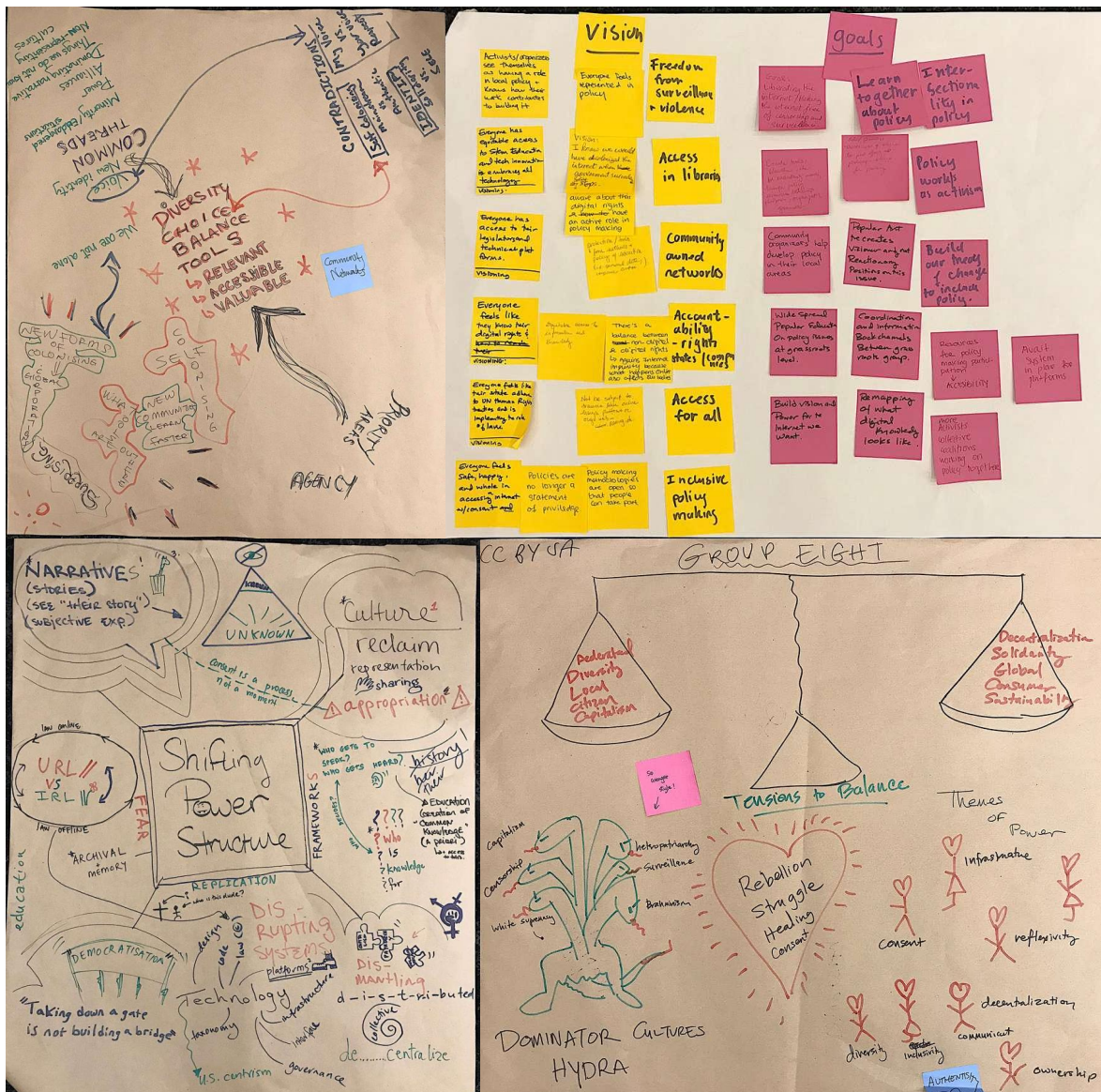


The days were driven by small group conversations. In the large group setting, we shared summaries of small group discussions and opened the conversation to people from other groups.

In groups of 8 to 10 people, participants worked through the key themes and goals of each day.







# WHAT WILL WE DO TOGETHER?

Sharing different experiences around freedom and decolonization led us to build alliances and identify key issues, as well as begin to draw a path to concrete actions that allow us to decolonize the virtual spaces we inhabit. At the Decolonizing the Internet conference, we seek to explore new discourses but we understand that those discourses must move to action in order to build a process of meaningful change. Collective action is based on alliances, support networks and solidarity.

Whose Knowledge? sought to facilitate a space where these alliances were made and from where people would start to scheme together across new contexts.



## ACTIONS

As action areas emerged, we clustered them around the following issues:

- Languages
- Libraries and Archives
- Wikipedia
- Media
- Representation and Stories
- Money and power
- Mapping the Decolonization Movement
- Credibility / Sources
- Policy
- Knowledge Systems and Structures
- Dismantling Privilege and Allyship
- Activism
- Critical Pedagogy
- Access and Infrastructure

After these larger action areas had been identified, participants were asked to come up with one concrete next step they could commit to taking as a smaller working group, and identify a group initiator who will be responsible for helping the group move forward as well as a set of participants who will be involved.

Whose Knowledge?'s commitment is to follow up with each action working group in six months, offer support to groups who request it, and help share what's learned from initiatives as they move forward.

We understand these are a set of small first steps in the direction of larger structural changes. The work we do from Whose Knowledge? and the values we stand for overlap significantly with most of these action areas, which indicates that we are all pulling in the same direction, and synergies can be stronger and meaningful.

A total of 33 next step actions emerged by the end of the conference, and participants chose to join them based on personal interests, affinity networks, work experience and dreams for the future.

### ***Mapping Decolonisation and Building Critical Pedagogy***

- Map the movement for decolonisation
- Build curricula for decolonizing the Internet in collaboration with schools, colleges/ universities
- Improve or create articles on the decolonisation movement across all wikipedias
- Explore a feminist approach to the knowledge commons by mapping existing open and collectives/initiatives in the periphery. Open a "bibliography" on existing research, thinking and analysis on feminism and the "commons"

### ***Media, Representation and Stories***

- Identify media studies experts by region who can point to audits of media gatekeepers and their motivations
- Organize storytelling circles local communities

- Begin an etherpad to collect instructional media resources
- Create a database of stories about why decolonising the internet is crucial. "Decolonising the internet in order to..."
- Amplify voices that talk about knowledge inequity using the Wikimedia blog
- Create a one page fact sheet to illustrate problems of knowledge inequity. Start by making an open call to people invested in those issues to share examples/ experiences

### ***Credibility / Sources***

- Set up a call to discuss integrations between Wikidata and the fact-checking community

### ***Money and power***

- Convert the Funder: find value indicators or "metrics" that resonate with non-represented communities – knowledge, traditions, values, in local contexts
- Create, populate and spread a knowledge base for funding underrepresented voices

### ***Libraries and Archives***

- Create working group to explore building a global network of archivists, activists and technologists, to advance community archiving efforts outside state and corporate control.
- Sign up for the "people's archival cloud", supporting free open public community non-corporate archives

### ***Languages***

- Support small languages and help them create their own Wikipedia page
- Coordinate on an article writing sprint in February, for international mother tongue day wikipedia

### ***Access and Infrastructure***

- Create a collective braindump of alternatives [to well-known modules] to talk about and learn about internet and infrastructure
- Create a forum of local communities to gather views on access to internet infrastructure and community knowledge
- Identify a community that wants to learn how to use and access resources related to the internet, and help them participate in an exchange of knowledge with others

### ***Policies on content and communities***

- Group-therapy on platform terms of service and community standards
- Build learning & action plans around UNHRC SR report on online content regulations
- Create a 1-page document reviewing policies on major Wikipedias to craft guidelines for creating localized policies on smaller wikipedias
- Create a Metapage to create a New Wikipedia Starter Kit for policies
- Review/Revise pillars of Wikipedia policy to add Decolonization as principle and policy of Wikipedia





# WHAT'S NEXT?

Whose Knowledge? will check in with each next action working group in a few months to find out what progress they have made toward their goals. Decolonization is a process! We're here to support and encourage community initiatives right *where they are*. Some of our working groups will have made huge strides in three or six months and others will still be defining their vision, or will have decided on an entirely different focus for collaboration. After leaving the collaborative space of Decolonizing the Internet, we all re-enter our own worlds of struggle and action, and we have to contend with competing priorities when taking on systemic injustices in the day-to-day. We know that not all of these action areas will be realized; and some will be realized, but not succeed. The process of visioning together opens up possibilities beyond the present moment for future engagements we have yet to imagine. We look forward to seeing where these initiatives go and how we can help amplify and support these growing actions, networks and alliances.



Image by IceM4k, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons.

## STAYING CONNECTED

The most important aspect of the Decolonizing the Internet conference was the space for discussion. We want to keep that energy alive, but we all live in different continents and contexts. So we've created a mailing list to communicate with one another over the coming months.



We want to maintain this list as a safe space for conversation around decolonization, so for now, membership will be restricted to participants at the Decolonizing the Internet conference and personal recommendations from the participants. Through our networks of communities and allies, and through additional Decolonizing the Internet events, we will grow the list into a broader conversation.

For updates on Decolonizing the Internet themes and events and to stay informed about Whose Knowledge?, anyone can sign up for our e-mail newsletter!<sup>[12]</sup>

[12] <https://whoseknowledge.org/join/>

# GRATITUDE

Decolonizing the Internet would not have been possible without everyone who joined the conversation. We just want to take this opportunity to thank a special few of our incredible supporters, partners, and allies who made the conversation happen.

## Facilitation

Shamillah Wilson

Kelly Foster

Jasmeen Patheja

Christel Steigenberger

## Logistics

Ayesha Davids

Sumaiyah Davids

Zubaida Hattas

Shobha SV

## Wikimedia ZA

Douglas Scott

All of Wikimedia ZA for hosting us in Cape Town

## Process design advice

Allen Gunn

Jac SM Kee

## Wikimedia Foundation

Ellie Young

Irene Tait

Louise Wo

## Group Facilitators

Lulu Barrera

Nic Bidwell

Stacy Allison Cassin

Peter Cunliffe-Jones

Amira Dhalla

Jac SM Kee

McKensie Mack

Ivan Martinez

Liang-chih Shang Kuan

Thenmozhi Soundararajan

Maari Zwick-Maitreyi

## The SunSquare Cape Town

### City Bowl Hotel

The entire team at the SunSquare Hotel - for making our stay comfortable and the conference run smoothly!

## Well-being and Safety

Bishakha Datta

## Funders

Shuttleworth Foundation

Hewlett Foundation

Global Fund for Women

Mozilla Foundation

*"Learnt a lot from the generous, committed & inspiring ppl at [#DecolonizeTheInternet](#) & [#Wikimania](#). Some reflections from the small spaces I was at (thread):  
- Shifting centres is like shedding skin. It's a continual process of learning, unlearning, uncovering, re/covering" - jhybe on [Twitter](#), 22 July 2018*

*"Would have loved to see this important [@WhoseKnowledge](#) panel as a plenary session at [#Wikimania2018](#). The diversity in perspective geographically and from indigenous cultures on centering knowledge from the margins is crucial. [@Wikimania@Wikimedia](#)"  
- [@nshockey](#) on [Twitter](#), 20 July 2018*

# REFLECTIONS

**MARTIN DITTUS** - *"Decolonising the Internet was an eye-opener for us on many levels. It was such a great privilege to share time and space with so many global experts of the local experience. Although the internet is a seemingly global medium, really what we're getting to see is often a standardised and Western-centric version of the world, often based on a misguided assumption of universality: an attempt to provide the same experience for everyone. At Decolonising the Internet, globality and pluriversality returned in all its beautiful and messy magic. There, I learned about the many ways in which current online experiences are really and substantively insufficient for the global majority. Mark (Graham) and I are incredibly grateful for the experience, and it has already informed our outputs in direct and indirect ways. We've formed relationships that will be instrumental to our upcoming research on global information inequalities. The discussions at the workshop really helped us refine our understanding of the varied tensions around online equity, and the lessons from these conversations will keep reverberating in our work for a long time."*

**SOL LUCA DE TENA** - *"I'm buzzing, I feel questions in every part of my being. I am familiar with searching, enquiring, questioning - I have always done so impulsively, but this feels different. I feel like rather than challenged by new ideas and experiences that people shared these last 2 days, it feels logical, familiar, natural, sane. I have never before felt so reflected in so many - diverse - people/thoughts as these last two days."*

**RACHEL KAGOIYA** - *"Still reminiscing the wonderful moments and learnings at the decolonizing the internet and #wikimania2018 - I'm truly looking forward to keep engaging with the Wikimedians and feminists and activists in pushing for an internet from us and for us all."*

**KELLY FOSTER** - *"Thank you for transforming Wikimania and creating a space to take action for the cause of liberation in the free knowledge movement. I'm excited about what we'll do next."*

**SHERRY ANTOINE** - *"Decolonizing the Internet was a very important part of the Wikimania conference for me. It provided a rare and important space to be around a smaller more concentrated group of like-minded open source, knowledge and social good influencers focused on application beyond the experience in Cape Town. The effects continue to reverberate. Thank you for creating the space and encouraging the spark. It was also wonderful to see the diverse array of organizers participating. This added to the bounty of perspectives and depth of analysis on some topics that needed it. Thank you for giving working groups time to really flesh out our topics. It never felt rushed or too slow. Just right. One thing that I hope is that this is something you will continue to do at each Wikimania and also a stand alone conference perhaps. For those not there, I think this method could be useful on a more local level as well as a model for their areas. It was very effective. The atmosphere of openness with the structure and timing were also valuable tools for that effectiveness and action focus. The discussion groups were among the most effective parts of the entire conference for me and this includes the larger main conference. They led to some great friendships and partnerships that are still paying off to this day."*



## SOME ADDITIONAL READING

- > [Wikimania 2018 Cape Town, South Africa + Decolonizing the Internet](#) by Subhashish Panigrahi in the OFDN
- > [Decolonizing the Internet 2018 and Wikimania 2018](#) by EQUALITY LABS
- > [Descolonizando Internet: una conferencia sobre el conocimiento marginalizado en la red](#) by Mariana Fossatti in Artica
- > [Descolonizar la Gobernanza de Internet. Algunas Reflexiones Despues de #Decolonizetheinternet y #LACIGF11](#) by Mariana Fossatti in GenderIT
- > [Decolonise the Internet: Solidarity is More than Just a Buzzword](#) by Maame Akua Kyerewaa-Marfo in AWDF
- > [Exploring Knowledge Through Art: A Virtual Exhibition](#)
- > [Snapshot of Our #DecolonizeTheInternet Conference](#)
- > [#DecolonizeTheInternet Countdown: an interview with Maame Akua Kyerewaa Marfo and Peter Cunliffe-Jones](#)
- > [Who edits Wikipedia?](#) Anasuya Sengupta talks with the BBC

