

Decolonising pedagogies in undergraduate geography: student perspectives on a Decolonial Movements module

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Decolonising pedagogies in undergraduate geography: student perspectives on a Decolonial Movements module

Abstract

Student-led movements have called for the decolonisation of the Higher Education (HE) system in the UK, as well as elsewhere. Much of the onus within British geography has been on decolonising geographical knowledges, recognising the role of the discipline in the colonial project. This paper expands on these literatures by examining how work on critical pedagogies can deepen the decolonising agenda within geography. In other words, it is not only *what* we teach that matters, but *how*. Using the perspectives of third year undergraduate geography and international development students at the University of Sussex taking a module entitled ‘Decolonial Movements’, I reflect on how to decolonise the way the subject is taught within the classroom. I make six tentative suggestions: ensuring a diversity of teaching staff, not just reading lists; enabling decolonial pedagogies; encouraging social justice, liberation and decolonisation; using creative and innovative teaching tools; decolonising assessment criteria; and embedding decolonisation across the curriculum. To be clear, the aim is not to produce any kind of standardised curriculum but to spark debate over meaningful forms of decolonising pedagogies in undergraduate geography, as well as to reflect on some of the challenges of implementing a decolonising praxis within UK universities.

Keywords: decolonisation, geography, pedagogy, curriculum, UK

1. Introduction

Over the past few years there has been impetus behind the decolonising Higher Education (HE) agenda at the University of Sussex. This has included – but is not limited to – a 2016 conference on ‘Decolonising Education towards Academic Freedom in Pluriversality’, a 2018 three-day workshop (in collaboration with SOAS) on ‘Decolonial Transformations’, working groups on decolonising pedagogy and programmes on closing the Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) attainment gap. The student campaign Decolonise Sussex has been key to instituting some of these changes and last year alone (2018/19) the group ran several student-staff forums focused on decolonising the curriculum, inclusive pedagogy and BAME student experiences, hosted a privilege workshop, set up zine-making and poetry workshops and launched a pilot project ‘Co-producing Sussex Curriculum’, which used student perspectives to revise a number of core modules in the Schools of Global Studies and English from decolonial, anti-racist and queer perspectives. The Decolonise Sussex campaign seeks to further the University’s programme of inclusive teaching by unpacking and challenging structures of exclusion within the educational system.

Partly in response to these agendas, I decided to design, prepare and deliver a new optional module entitled ‘Decolonial Movements’ for third year students on the single and dual honours BA degrees in geography and international development, respectively, starting in the 2017/18 academic year. My background researching the geographies of social movements and engaging with decolonial theory and praxis meant a ‘Decolonial Movements’ module seemed a good fit. A module on this topic also provided me with the opportunity to share my political commitment to the decolonising agenda. This has been nurtured through ethnographic research with indigenous movements in Latin America that demand the recognition of their territorial self-determination and political autonomy as indigenous nations

(see Laing, 2019, 2020). As Juan José Sardina, a *Cacique* (Local Chieftain) of the Chichas nation in Potosí, Bolivia, once told me, “as we are living, you have lived, you have seen it all. You are a walking testimony that will arrive there in Europe”. Indeed, indigenous perspectives firmly root my understanding of the decolonial project as about reclaiming what has been taken through colonisation, as well as the on-going legacies of colonialism in the modern world, and validating indigenous (and other marginalised) ways of knowing, sensing and being. This delineation is consistent with Latin American decolonial theorists who determine decoloniality to be about ‘delinking’, or the foregrounding of other systems of knowledge and understanding as a way to disrupt the apparent universality of Eurocentricism (Mignolo, 2007). This would entail a shift towards “pluri-versality as a universal project” (Mignolo, 2007, p. 453). In other words, it would require a political vision of a world in which multiple cosmovisions, practices and livelihoods would co-exist.

My teaching therefore strives to challenge and resist on-going forms of coloniality – the “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243) – by using theory informed by a decolonial framework. The Decolonial Movements module seeks to re-interpret issues of race, class, gender, and other antagonisms, from the perspectives of indigenous and (formerly) colonised peoples to expose the limits of a Western epistemology (Grosfoguel, 2002; Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Mignolo, 2009; Tuhiwai Smith, 2002). It also shifts the emphasis past the focus on knowledge by examining a variety of emancipatory political struggles – including indigenous, feminist, environmental and Black movements – from the past and present that could be conceived of as having a decolonial trajectory. The students critically analyse a number of case studies, such as Latin American indigenous autonomy movements, Rhodes Must Fall in South Africa, Black Lives Matter in the USA and Buen Vivir in Bolivia/Ecuador. This illustrates that decolonisation is not a ‘metaphor’ (see Tuck & Yang, 2012) as it can only come about through social transformation.

This emphasis on praxis and undoing the legacies of coloniality is what distinguishes decoloniality from postcolonial critique and deconstruction (Mignolo, 2007).

Since the start of teaching on the module I have felt a profound discomfort with teaching subjects of race, indigeneity and southern knowledges as a White, British, middle-class female, however. I have (somewhat) placated my inner doubts through the belief that decoloniality cannot come about from a subaltern positioning alone. As Cree/Salteaux/Dakota scholar Shauneen Pete states, decolonising work in the academy “is not my work alone; the longer I do this work the more I am convinced that this is white work” (2018, p.187). Nevertheless, I am acutely aware that my position is one of privilege and that my understandings and experiences of colonial violences and decolonial agendas will always be necessarily constrained. Reflecting on my institutionally granted power as a Lecturer in International Development in the Department of Geography, I have also become cognisant that I am afforded the authority and legitimacy to shape and redefine what is meant by the decolonial project within the classroom. I fear that this causes a distancing abstraction that could actually work to re-embed the hegemonic geo-politics of knowledge production when the language of ‘decolonisation’ gets captured and co-opted by Western-based academics.

One of the areas where I have felt this tension most acutely is through a disjuncture between *what* is taught and *how* it is taught. Although the module teaches about important social antagonisms in the past and present, as well as offering a range of readings and voices from outside of a Western based epistemology, the style of teaching often falls short of the critical pedagogies offered by scholars to bring about positive societal transformation (de Lissovoy, 2010; Freire, 2006 [1970]; Giroux, 2011; hooks, 1994). This was particularly evident in a week on the Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa. Having done a significant amount of work to gather scholarly contributions on the coloniality of knowledge and methods for decolonising education, I was excited to convey this knowledge to the

students in the workshop. After traipsing through several heavily theoretical slides talking about the difference between a ‘banking’ and ‘problem posing’ system (see Freire, (2006 [1970])), I became aware of the irony of my delivery. At the time I pointed out this irony to my students and laughed it off, but afterwards reflected that my teaching style could be improved to ‘practice what I preach’.

It was evident after the first class that all of us agreed, albeit it with different understandings and agendas, with the decolonial project. Students clearly felt that HE was one of the primary axes for resisting Eurocentricism. I therefore decided to seek student engagement in decolonising the module by asking them to do an in-class group exercise reflecting on some of the practical ways in which the disciplines and teaching in the School of Global Studies could be decolonised. This activity sought to challenge the institutional authority that academic faculty hold over students by recognising the value of student standpoints, particularly on issues where they may have more experiential understanding of how colonial structures of power, control and hegemony work to disenfranchise certain people over others e.g. as students variously categorised or self-identifying as BAME, from the so-called ‘global South’, part of the LGBTQ+ community and/or living with a disability. This paper draws on these student perspectives to determine the ways in which the module could incorporate wider agendas to decolonise pedagogy.

The aim of this paper is to consider issues of decolonising pedagogies and the curricula in undergraduate geography. First, I will examine some of the wider debates on decolonising HE and the curriculum and then discuss how these have been applied within the discipline of geography. Following this, I will delineate the methodology used for this paper. The next section will then draw on student perspectives to consider the opportunities and challenges of engaging a decolonial pedagogy. I conclude with some tentative suggestions on how academics could implement a decolonial pedagogy within their own educational spaces.

Ultimately, this paper is intended to spark further debate within geography on the challenges and opportunities of decolonising curricula in a meaningful, positive and transformative way.

2. Decolonial Pedagogy and Political Interventions on Campus

In March 2015, a student Chumani Maxwele threw human excrement at a University of Cape Town statue in protest of the continued institutionalisation of racism and colonial ideologies on campus. The protest was directed at a statue commemorating Cecil Rhodes, a controversial figure for his role as an imperialist, businessman and politician in southern Africa in the late 19th Century. Student activists were condemning him as a racist and an architect of apartheid, as he had worked to alter laws on voting and land ownership to the detriment of Black populations. The #RhodesMustFall protests received global media coverage and the demand for the removal of the statue became the focal point for a much larger conversation about the coloniality embedded within HE in South Africa.

Student movements have also taken up the call to decolonise HE within the UK. The University of London's campaign 'Why is My Curriculum White' highlights the lack of diversity in reading lists and course content, whilst the School of Oriental and African Studies movement 'Decolonising Our Minds' seeks to "challenge the political, intellectual and structural legacies of colonialism and racism both within and outside the university" (SOAS Students Union, 2019, n.pag.). Similar campaigns have sprung up at other universities, including Sussex, Warwick, Oxford, Cambridge and Birmingham, to name a few. Student-led decolonisation movements have challenged HE institutions for disproportionately representing White, male Western voices and consequently marginalising other voices and forms of knowledge, as well as for re-embedding structural inequalities that create barriers for some students and faculty to get an equitable institutional experience. A 2009 study of BAME

students found that “42 per cent did not believe their curriculum reflected issues of diversity, equality and discrimination” and “34 per cent stated that they felt unable to bring their perspectives as a Black student to lectures and tutor meetings” (NUS, 2011, p. 4). There is also a significant BAME attainment gap with 57.5 per cent of Black students and 70.5 per cent of Asian students receiving a first or upper-second-class degree in 2017-18, compared with 80.9 per cent of White students (UUK-NUS, 2019a).

A number of decolonial scholars have acknowledged that there is a ‘coloniality of knowledge’ that results in the privileging of Eurocentric ways of knowing and understanding the world (Coronil, 1996; Dussel, 1998; Lander, 2000; Mignolo, 2000). This acts to silence other knowledges and further colonial subjugation. In Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai-Smith’s seminal work *Decolonising Methodologies*, she argues that “it appals us [indigenous Maoris] that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas” (2002, p. 1). Her work shows how colonialism contributed to both the appropriation of indigenous knowledges and the simultaneous denial of indigenous peoples as knowledge producers. This coloniality remains embedded within the current geopolitics of knowledge production whereby the Western world is at the centre of deciding whose knowledge counts. Grosfoguel argues that the “the canon of thought in all the disciplines of the Social Sciences and Humanities in the *Westernized university*” has been “based on the knowledge produced by a few men from five countries in Western Europe (Italy, France, England, Germany and the USA)” (2013, p. 74). For de Sousa Santos (2016), the disavowal of knowledges, voices and perspectives outside of Western modernity is tantamount to ‘epistemicide’, or the killing of other knowledge systems. Epistemicide was not just essential for the European colonial project, but remains central to the current system of Eurocentric knowledge production.

For these scholars, the process of “learning to unlearn the imperial education is the starting point of decolonial education” (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 22). For Tuhiwai Smith, this does not entail an outright rejection of Western thought but “rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purpose” (2002, p. 39). De Lissovoy suggests that an education aimed toward ethical and democratic globality would recognise “the relations of power that have shaped history, and in particular the political, cultural, economic, and epistemological processes of domination that have characterized colonialism and Eurocentricism” (2010, p. 279). Decolonial thinkers call for ‘epistemic disobedience’ as a way to de-link from the Western idea of modernity, humanity and rationality (Mignolo, 2009), ‘border thinking’ as an exercise of thinking from alternative voices, perspectives and ways of understanding (Mignolo, 2011) and the recognition of ‘southern theory’, that is theories outside of the dominant European and North American metropole (Connell, 2007). Enacting these political and epistemic moves will enable a shift away from *universality* toward *pluriversality* (see Reiter, 2018).

These movements and agendas have instituted some positive institutional changes, with university efforts targeted toward diversifying the curriculum, widening participation, closing the attainment gap and enhancing BAME student experiences (see UUK-NUS, 2019b). In many instances, decolonising agendas have been included within the trend towards recognising diversity and inclusivity within UK HE (see Hockings, 2010; Mirza & Meeto, 2012). For instance, amid calls to decolonise the curriculum, Universities UK commissioned a review of how institutions can ensure that more BAME students graduate with top degrees. A key recommendation was “developing racially diverse and inclusive environments”, acknowledging that “some curriculums do not reflect minority groups’ experiences” (UUK-NUS, 2019a, p. 2). As such, a publication by the HEA suggests that ‘decolonising education’,

includes efforts to ‘internationalise’ the curriculum through the inclusion of global examples, reach and content, but also moves past this to extend inter-cultural literacy among staff and students through their broader experience of HE, improving their ability to think and work using different cultural perspectives (Ryan & Tilbury, 2013, p. 20).

Nonetheless, the inclusivity and internalisation agenda, alongside respect for difference and diversity, is not enough to decolonise universities. A true decolonisation of the academy must include dismantling the structural architecture of White privilege (Arday & Mirza, 2018), a term used by critical race theorists to analyse how societal privilege benefits people racialised as White (see McIntosh, 1990, Moreton-Robinson, 2004). Even where universities have worked to diversify their faculty, Maldonado-Torres suggests that this can “turn into surreptitious efforts to find these kind of scholars, who will then ‘normalize’ the new spaces by aligning them with the traditional standards” (2016, p. 3). These criticisms speak to wider debates around the opportunities and challenges of positive discrimination within HE (see Noon, 2012). There is also a concern that the student decolonising campaigns will be co-opted and consequently de-radicalised if they become subsumed within the celebratory rhetoric of inclusive, international and multicultural teaching at universities (see Gebrial, 2018; Icaza & Vázquez, 2018; Last, 2018). Instead, decolonisation must address the relations of power that defines who or what counts as valid knowledge within HE institutions. As Carol Azumah Dennis contends, decolonising education is not “something straightforward and accomplished without opposition or contestation” (2018, p. 199). Thus, adding a few readings from non-Western scholars to reading lists or adding a section of the course on ‘race’ is a shallow interpretation of the decolonial agenda.

Much of the onus for academic teaching staff has been placed on diversifying the curriculum to provide teaching that de-centres Eurocentricism and on providing inclusive reading lists that reflect a broader range of thinkers from outside of Western epistemology. There has been less emphasis placed on how knowledge and skills are imparted within an educational context, however (see Icaza & Vázquez, 2018). In other words, it is not only *what* we teach that matters, but *how*. Dialoguing with literatures on critical pedagogies may provide one route to a deeper decolonisation of HE. The work of Brazilian adult educator Paulo Freire is useful here. In his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006 [1970]), he contended that learners must develop a ‘critical consciousness’ to move past the ‘culture of silence’ created by the dominant system of social relations. Freire developed two versions of education: the ‘banking’ system whereby a narrating subject (the teacher) imparts knowledge on a patient, listening object (the student); and the ‘problem posing’ system whereby knowledge is not deposited from the teacher to student, but as a dialogue between the two. He argued that education could only be a source of liberation when it follows the latter of these two pedagogies. The idea that the oppressed must fight for their own liberation through critical consciousness was developed from the work of anti-colonial writer and revolutionary Frantz Fanon. Fanon’s texts, including *The Wretched of the Earth* (2001 [1963]) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (2019 [1967]) illustrate the ‘psychic’ dimension of colonialism, including the internalisation of oppressions. He believed that anti-colonial liberation could not come about from the knowledge imparted by revolutionary leadership and their political speeches, but rather “to educate the masses politically...is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them” (2001, p. 159). The feminist and social activist bell hooks takes these ideas further, but includes a feminist critique to Freire’s work. In her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* she calls for an ‘open learning community’ where “there must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences

the classroom dynamics, that everyone contributes” (1994, p. 8). Hooks argues that pedagogy should be a form of political activism where teaching “enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries...the practice of freedom” (1994, p. 12). For these scholars, the importance of political self-education and critical consciousness becomes central to understanding how oppressed peoples can attain a more meaningful form of liberation.

Indeed, it is widely acknowledged in the literature on critical pedagogies that it is not enough to simply teach about social antagonisms (de Lissovoy, 2010; Freire, 2006; Giroux, 2011). Rather, Monzó and McLaren contend that “[t]he hallmarks of critical pedagogy are its infusion of hope and its demand for collective social transformation through critical consciousness and a philosophy of praxis” (2014, p. 515). As such, several problem-posing and politically conscious pedagogies have been suggested to decolonise HE, including (but not limited to): the use of land to generate embodied knowledges within Nishnaabeg indigenous communities (Simpson, 2014); storytelling as a way to reclaim aboriginal forms of knowledge transference (Pete, 2018); using self-disclosure and the vulnerability of the teacher to facilitate students own learning about their privileged or marginalised identities (Kishimoto & Mwangi, 2009); ‘walking and asking’ with decolonial movements as a way to challenge the dominant discourses of truth production (Walsh, 2015); creating engaged classrooms where pedagogies can be co-created to address issues of gender, sexuality and race (Mehta, 2019); the creation of ‘borderlands’ to get students to rethink their own histories, identities and opportunities to learn (Giroux, 1991); and using arts-based learning as a site of critical resistance (Oladimeji, 2018).

2.1. Decolonising the geography curriculum

Within British geography, postcolonial scholars have highlighted the complicity of the discipline for British imperial and colonial domination over space in the late 19th Century (Crush, 1994; Nash, 2000). David Livingstone has noted “geography was the science of imperialism *par excellent*” because “exploration, topographic and social survey, cartographic representation, and regional inventory...were entirely suited to the colonial project” (1993, p. 160-70, cited in Nash, 2000, p. 193-4). Whilst this history has been acknowledged, geographers have only recently begun to fully explore how the discipline can be decolonised from these roots (see de Leeuw & Hunt, 2018). The theme for the chair’s plenaries at the 2017 Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) (RGS-IBG) Annual Conference was ‘Decolonising geographical knowledges: opening geography out to the world’, preceded by a special issue in the journal *Area* on ‘Decolonising geographical knowledge in a colonised and re-colonising postcolonial world’ (Noxolo, 2017) and a special issue in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* on ‘Decolonising Geographical Knowledges’ (Radcliffe, 2017). Geographers have highlighted the ‘Whiteness’ of the discipline (de Leeuw & Hunt, 2018; Desai, 2017; Esson, 2018; Tolia-Kelly, 2017), as well as the role of British geography in re-producing colonial forms of knowledge (Elliot-Cooper, 2017). Sarah Radcliffe underlines the pressing importance of these debates at a time “when relations between the geographical discipline, security concerns (whether environmental or geopolitical) and policy imperatives are being re-articulated under colonial-modern frames” (2017, p. 331). There is therefore an increasing recognition that as geographers, we must work to dismantle the colonialism embedded in our discipline by decolonising geographical knowledges, for instance by engaging with ‘southern’ knowledges to challenge the way knowledge is produced within geography (Jazeel, 2017).

Undoubtedly, challenging the coloniality embedded within geographical knowledge is integral for a decolonising move in the discipline. Nonetheless, as Bolivian subaltern theorist

and activist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) has pointed out, decoloniality must come about through praxis and not discourse alone. For Tuck and Yang, calls to ‘decolonise our schools’, ‘decolonise methods’ or ‘decolonise student thinking’ reduces “decolonization into a metaphor” (2012, p.2) since it does not directly challenge systems of settler colonialism. Within geography,

the emphasis on decolonising geographical knowledges rather than structures, institutions and praxis reproduces coloniality, because it recentres non-Indigenous, white and otherwise privileged groups in the global architecture of knowledge production (Esson et al., 2017, p.385)

Likewise, de Leeuw and Hunt (2018) argue that coloniality continues to structure the discipline of geography and the wider university, since White settler scholars, knowledges and voices are still centred over indigenous ways of knowing and understanding the world. As such, “the discipline has yet to achieve much semblance of decolonization” (2018, p.10). This was showcased in the 2017 RGS-IBG conference, where there was only a shallow examination of geography’s role for establishing colonialism and upholding conditions of racism/coloniality or of the complicity of the RGS in the colonial project, as well as the fact that many of the keynotes on decolonising geographical knowledges were by White scholars (Esson et al., 2017; Last, 2018).

Here, I suggest that a deeper decolonising move within the field of geography would require – amongst other things – a substantive reflection on our pedagogical practices. Indeed, there has been some engagement with how pedagogies can be used to decolonise the discipline. Melissa Nursey-Bray (2019) looks at how to ‘indigenise’ the curriculum in Australia for cultural and social inclusivity. The author argues that it is not enough to include

indigenous histories of oppression and dispossession as content on modules, as it is necessary to “build towards a drastic re-structuring in practice of entire course frameworks consistent with Indigenous ways of doing and seeing” (2019, p. 323). Other geographers have also sought to engage with indigenous knowledges and ways of understanding the world, for instance by drawing on their own experiences as indigenous rights activists to get students to engage with community groups outside the classroom to decolonise the geographical imagination through an ‘applied peoples’ geography (Howitt, 2001), through pushing students to learn from – rather than about – indigenous autonomy movements as a way to unsettle colonial geographical knowledges (Daigle & Sundberg, 2017) and by encouraging undergraduate dissertation students to challenge colonial conventions of the ‘onlooker’ to link research methodologies to the priorities of indigenous communities (Hodge & Lester, 2006). These contributions come from countries where settler colonialism continues to erode indigenous forms of knowledge, identity and sovereignty. Yet, there has been less engagement in pedagogical research on how to decolonise tertiary geography curriculums in the UK, despite the country’s historic situation at the heart of colonial knowledge production. This is not to say that critical and activist pedagogies for positive societal transformation are not being engaged in the discipline (see Chatterton, 2008a; Hay, 2001; Heyman, 2000), but that there is almost nothing written on pedagogical approaches and best practices for decolonising the UK geography curriculum.

3. Methodology

The following examination of how to decolonise pedagogies within geography draws on an exercise carried out with the 2018/19 cohort of geography and international development students, respectively, on my third year optional Decolonial Movements module. This group

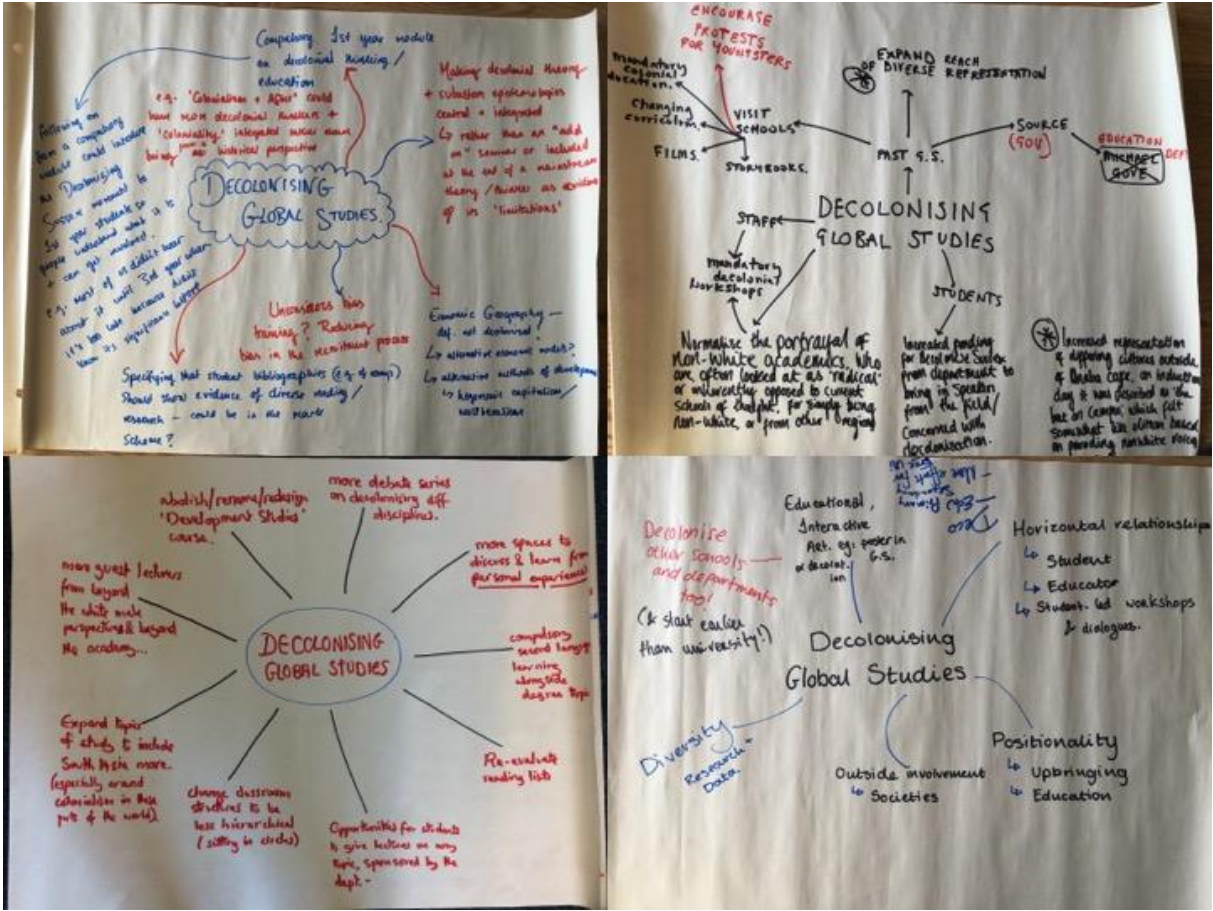
exercise with the 39 students consisted of using flip chart paper to mind map the concrete ways in which both students and faculty can decolonise the School of Global Studies at the University of Sussex. Specifically, I asked the students to think about the different material, discursive and symbolic strategies for doing this. The students were then asked to present and explain their mind maps to the rest of the group. Ethical approval for this project was granted by the University of Sussex and the mind maps and quotes from the exercise are used here with consent from the students.

I have chosen to reflect on the mind map exercise here since the students enrolled on the module were critically engaged with debates on decolonisation (as an optional module they had chosen), were thinking through these issues as part of their examination of theory on decolonising knowledges, as well as student-led decolonisation movements, and because the students raised some pertinent issues that were not being addressed by decolonial agendas within the university. To be clear, the aim is not to produce any kind of standardised curriculum given the multiple interpretations of what the term ‘decolonisation’ means within geography (see de Leeuw & Hunt, 2018) and given the inappropriateness of arriving at any form of singular best practice. It is also important to acknowledge that these perspectives will be necessarily partial, particularly as the students’ reflections may be distorted by my use of the classroom as a pedagogic research space (although this was hopefully mitigated by letting the students know that they should not feel compelled to take part, that they could withdraw their data at any time and that their participation would not impact their marks, assessments or future studies). Rather, by drawing from a collaborative approach to knowledge production and appraisal amongst staff and students, the goal is to open up debate over meaningful forms of decolonising pedagogies in geography.

4. Decolonising the module: reflections on student perspectives

Although not all of the recommendations can be accommodated at module level, below I reflect on six of the students' key suggestions through the mind-mapping exercise (see Figure 1), analysing whether they have been instituted within the Decolonial Movements module and if not, how they could be used to initiate change in the future.

Figure 1. Student mind maps on decolonising Global Studies



i) Diversity of teaching staff, not just reading lists

We need to look at representations – involving academics, professors etc. from the global South. Not just as in people who have actually been raised in those societies,

but people who have been influenced by development policies that have been made in the West. (Student A)

Having more guest teachers. Obviously we know it's hard – you can't just hire people for the sake of diversity. But, maybe flying people over on scholarships from the global South to do guest teaching even for a short period of time. (Student B)

Normalising the portrayal of non-White academics, whilst being aware that they are often seen as radical or inherently opposed to conventional rules of thought simply for being non-White or from other regions. (Student C)

Students pointed out that there should be greater representation of non-White, non-Western knowledge producers in the classroom. They welcomed the move towards greater diversity and inclusivity on reading lists, but thought that this would not address the wider structural issues around knowledge production within the academy. For BAME students in particular, it was noted that they would welcome the normalising of non-White academics on campus. They were clear that this should not be for the sake of metrics or to satisfy diversity agendas, since being a non-Western or non-White scholar does not mean that they would necessarily bring a perspective that challenges the modern, colonial world system. At present, the module challenges the “politics of knowledge in education” (de Lissovoy, 2010, p. 280) and de-centres Western forms of knowledge production by opening up the reading list to include contributions from a greater range of thinkers (namely people of colour, women, LGBTQ+, Indigenous and non-western backgrounds). A number of films and podcasts produced by activist groups engaged in politics of race, indigeneity, sexuality and gender are also included on the virtual learning environment. Nonetheless, the teaching is exclusively done myself. Indeed, there are limits to what can be achieved on the module due to resourcing, issues of language translation and the wider geopolitics of knowledge production (see Mignolo, 2002).

For example, there is limited access to financial remuneration – albeit problematic in itself – for guest speakers from the global South or from outside of academia. I could invite speakers from local activist and student union groups doing activities that relate to the module’s content. However, without some form of reciprocal benefit from the relationship, these engagements could re-embed the power hierarchies the module seeks to challenge and re-work.

ii) Decolonial pedagogies

Having horizontal relationships between the students and the educator. For example, by having student-led workshops and dialogues, which is kind of already the case with seminars but I think personally when I learn the most is when everybody is talking together. (Student D)

Students suggested tutors should encourage horizontal relationships between the student and the educator, for instance by introducing student-led workshops. This echoes one of the agendas of the Decolonise Sussex campaign that suggests developing “pedagogies that engage students as active agents shaping their own learning and away from teaching structures that maintain hierarchies and power imbalances in the classroom” (Sussex Student’s Union, 2016, n.p.). The module is delivered through a 3-hour weekly workshop that combines lecture-style teaching with student-led seminar-style learning. The workshops include various enquiry-based, problem-based and discovery learning tasks, including critically analysing academic and non-academic texts, connecting examples and evidence to theoretical knowledge, experiential learning, group tasks and in-class debates. This recognises studies that document that students can learn more effectively when they are given the opportunity to take an active role in the learning process (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Sivan et al,

2000). I also ensure that the teaching environment is as inclusive and open as possible by encouraging students to bring their own perspectives to the classroom (hooks, 1994), through an open acknowledgement of my own positionality and areas of weakness (Kishimoto & Mwangi, 2009) and through problem-posing activities for student-centred learning (Freire, 2006). Nonetheless, the module could offer more opportunities for student-led learning (Jones, 2007; Kremer & McGuinness, 1998), such as by getting students to research and present on topics/theories/movements of their choosing or by offering students the chance to be co-producers in the curriculum design (Bovill & Bulley, 2011). Again, there are issues here. As one colleague noted, the current pilot project aimed at co-producing curriculums with students at the university exploits their knowledge and time with no financial remuneration or reward, re-embedding the power inequalities between student and educator that it seeks to challenge. At a personal level, there is also a discomfort with student-led learning since it requires losing ‘control’ in the classroom, something for which I do not feel adequately trained or confident enough in my ad hoc teaching abilities to carry out effectively. The students acknowledged these restrictions and suggested that the university provide the tools needed to retrain teaching staff through decolonising curriculums and pedagogies workshops. They were also adamant that these should be mandatory, rather than optional, so that all staff – and not just those already committed to decolonisation – have to attend to these agendas. This requirement to ‘learn to unlearn’ (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012) our academic training is unlikely to be popular at a time when lecturing staff are increasingly overworked, however.

iii) Social justice, liberation and decolonisation

Encouraging activism and teaching students the tools to become activists. (Student E)

Being aware that decolonisation is about practice and cannot just be about theory. Like, it's not enough to just speak from an ivory tower, like Mignolo and other people like that. You have to actually engage in making a change. So, maybe people [teaching staff] could do that more on modules. (Student F)

Students were passionate that teaching should actively encourage students to engage in decolonial praxis, including through protests and direct action, and also that it should emphasise that decolonisation cannot come about through theoretical content on curriculums alone. This echoes the Rivera Cusicanqui's contention that "[t]here can be no discourse of decolonization, no theory of decolonization, without a decolonizing practice" (2012, p.100). Currently, the module emphasises real-world relevance through the use of case studies of decolonial movements and by asking the students to discuss their own involvement in campaigns or social movements. Participation in the Decolonise Sussex campaign was also encouraged by inviting a student union representative from the group to speak to the students. In addition, my teaching often draws on my own experience as an activist and researcher of indigenous autonomy and environmental movements. Following radical academic-activist geographers (Chatterton, 2008a, 2008b; Hay, 2001), I could place more emphasis on actively promoting campaigning and forms of civic activism. For instance, in a week on 'decolonising solidarity' students could engage in an act of solidarity (e.g. protest, awareness raising, boycotting, petitioning) with a decolonial campaign of their own choosing. For Dennis, decolonising education must come about through creating "a continuity between the pedagogical and the political, weaving threads of resistance, opposition and insurgency to accomplish its purpose" (2018, p. 190). Yet, university management could be resistant to such moves, particularly when they challenge the structures of White privilege within the academy

(see for example, Grove, 2015).

iv) Creative and innovative teaching tools

We talked about having educational and interactive arts. (Student D)

Simple things like storybooks and films really impact on subconscious ideas about the world. (Student G)

Students suggested using more films, storybooks, visits and art as ways to learn differently from the traditional lecture and also through using alternative mediums that de-centre written texts as the only source of legitimate knowledge within the academy. This echoes Oladimeji's (2018) suggestion of using arts-based learning as a site of critical resistance. The module currently includes several creative teaching tools, including films, examples of indigenous poetry and blog sites to analyse forms of coloniality and also to learn from sites of resistance and activism. That said, more could be done to get students to engage with a wider variety of learning materials and forms of knowledge production, such as art, song and visual performance. Undoubtedly, the assessment mode – two conventional essays – does nothing to challenge the idea that written texts constitute the only source of valid knowledge.

v) Decolonised Assessment Criteria

Specifying that student bibliographies – so within their essays – should evidence diverse reading and research. So, potentially putting something about that into the marking scheme so that people actually have to read a more diverse body of texts in order to get a better grade. (Student H)

Students were keen that marking criteria for the module should reflect the commitment to using readings that acknowledged contributions from a greater range of thinkers (namely people of colour, women, LGBTQ+, indigenous and non-western backgrounds). They also suggested that this should be reflected on all assessment criteria as part of the University's commitment to the inclusivity and decolonising agenda. In the assessment guidance for the module, I make clear that the references used should show an engagement with scholars and thinkers that offer an alternative epistemology to the Western canon. The assessment criteria cannot be changed for the purposes of the module, however, as it is generic across each of the disciplines (Geography, International Development, International Relations and Anthropology) of the School of Global Studies. Conversations I have had so far suggest that this is not something that fits into the remit of 'core' marking criteria, which perhaps illustrates how far universities will actually go to institute deeper forms of decolonisation.

vi) Embedding decolonisation across the curriculum

Making decolonial theories and subaltern epistemologies central, rather than an add-on. So, rather than adding it onto modules, making it central and integrated and not including it at the end. The only time I've heard of it [decolonial theory] before has been at the end [of a module] after the same mainstream thinkers that you hear all the time, so when talking about their limitations. So, "they don't really consider this" is the only time you'd hear that side of the argument. It would only be talked about as a limitation, not as a theory in and of itself. (Student H)

Many of the students stated that they thought that it was a shame that they were only hearing about decolonial theory and praxis in their third year of the undergraduate degree and as part of an optional module. The students thought that decoloniality needed to be embedded in the

curriculum from the first year. In particular, they emphasised that much of their teaching had been about colonialism and post-colonial theory, but what they had learnt had not stressed how the effects of colonialism were still felt today (i.e. through coloniality and settler colonialism) and that there were movements aimed towards undoing these legacies. As a final year module, the teaching material is designed to build on the subject knowledge (e.g. post-colonial theory, colonial histories, geographies of race and ethnicity) attained by students in previous academic years. However, this perpetuates the idea that ‘decoloniality’ is an add-on, or criticism of, the predominant White, male, Western canon of thought, rather than the starting point for epistemic justice. As Tuck and Yang contend, “[d]ecolonization offers a different perspective to human and civil rights based approaches to justice, an unsettling one, rather than a complementary one. Decolonization is not an “and”. It is an elsewhere” (2012, p.36). Although there have been moves to decolonise the international development curricula at Sussex, there has been very little engagement with these agendas in the geography department.

5. Discussion

To be sure, the above student suggestions will not encompass all of the pedagogical tools needed to decolonise the curriculum. Rather, the above is intended to offer a snapshot to some of the different viewpoints on decolonisation by cognitively and emotionally engaged students. What is clear is that understandings of a decolonised curriculum go beyond the inclusivity and diversity agendas of universities. In particular, students stressed the role of praxis, and not just theory, as central to decolonisation. As Tuck and Yang state, “[w]hen metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization” (2012, p.3). It was also evident that they did not think that other forms of knowledge production that de-

centres Eurocentricism should be a tokenistic ‘add-ons’, but rather be “legitimized as co-existent representations of knowledge” (Nursey-Bray, 2019, p.325). Whilst there is a tendency for students, as well as geographical literature, to romanticise certain constructions of knowledge such as by indigenous peoples (see Carter & Hollinsworth, 2017), students who engaged with the course material were clear that voices from non-Western, non-White and global South perspectives should not necessarily be considered as more decolonial or emancipatory. These agendas cannot therefore be met through positive discrimination of staff based on categorisations of race, gender, sexuality, religion etc., even if this is important for diversity and inclusivity. The students also emphasised that decolonising the curriculum is not solely about incorporating non-normative knowledges into teaching material and alternative voices onto reading lists, but it is also a question of how we teach and learn. This echoes the work of the Diversity Commission of the University of Amsterdam, which included two areas of enquiry: “(a) *what* knowledge is being produced and (b) *how* it is being taught?” (Icaza & Vázquez, 2018, p. 114).

It is, however, important to appreciate the challenges of decolonising the curriculum within existing neo-liberalising and colonising institutions. Undoubtedly, it is impossible to overturn the geopolitics of knowledge production through one module. The wider geopolitics of knowledge production, such as access to academic writing forums and publishing hierarchies, re-establishes White privilege within UK HE (Last, 2018). In times of ‘austerity’ in universities, there are few resources for inviting guest speakers into modules or for translating non-English texts for students to engage in. Nor can these suggestions challenge the privatisation of the neoliberal university, in which issues of access to HE are fundamentally also questions of social justice and the “social structures that derive from histories of colonialism and Empire” (Holmwood, 2018, p.43). Fundamentally, this raises

“the question of whether the decolonial demand can ever be fully met within the institution” (Gebrial, 2018, p.29).

6. Conclusions

This paper is a call for geographers to reflect on structures of coloniality embedded within the discipline and look to find ways to use uniquely situated opportunities for educational change. I have examined the literatures around decolonising HE and suggested that more engagement with scholarly contributions on critical pedagogies could enrich the decolonising HE agenda. In particular, I have suggested that it is not enough to diversify curriculums and reading lists, without reflecting on our teaching pedagogies. In other words, it is not only *what* we teach that matters, but *how*. Within the discipline of geography, much of the focus has been on how to decolonise geographical knowledges with little emphasis on how the discipline is taught within the classroom. Using perspectives from an in-class exercise with geography and international development students, respectively, on my third year undergraduate module Decolonial Movements, I have made six tentative suggestions for decolonising geography: ensuring a diversity of teaching staff, not just reading lists; enabling decolonial pedagogies; encouraging social justice, liberation and decolonisation; using creative and innovative teaching tools; decolonising assessment criteria; and embedding decolonisation across the curriculum.

We must seek the benefits of enriching our curriculums through efforts towards decolonisation, whilst being aware of – and pushing back against – the systems of structural inequality and injustice within the academy as a result of colonial legacies. In particular, we need to be vigilant of the ways in which celebrating the language of ‘decolonising our

curriculums’, ‘decolonising the university’ or ‘decolonising geographical knowledges’ without an active “decolonizing practice” (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012, p.100), would serve to re-embed the current geopolitics of knowledge production. As Tuck and Yang (2012) explain, the process of decolonisation is and should be fundamentally ‘unsettling’. It will not come about through shallow ‘add-ons’ to our reading lists, teachings on race and colonialism and the same old lecture style pedagogies. For many of us, the work will begin with ‘learning to unlearn’ (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012) our academic training as teachers of geography in order to speak *from* and *with*, rather than *for*, subaltern knowledges, voices and perspectives. We must then use these new tools to demand changes to the wider structural frameworks that uphold coloniality within the academy. Although the suggestions and reflections made here focus on the teaching of geography in HE, the debates raised here have wider relevance beyond the discipline.

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None

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