

Chapter 16

Towards a Decolonised Future for Higher Education

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It has now been a decade since the 2015 Rhodes Must Fall campaigns began and the phrase ‘Decolonising the Curriculum’ (DtC) became part of the higher education landscape in the UK and beyond. In that time, it has become increasingly clear that an effective decolonising strategy must extend to the structures and leadership of universities (Shafi, chapter 14). However, even without significant support from those with decision-making power in higher education institutions, the chapters in this book have demonstrated inspiring and innovative grassroots efforts to actively engage with transforming colonial curricula. In bringing together a multidisciplinary community of academics to showcase and describe their efforts and challenges in one publication, we have endeavoured to convey that decolonising work is a collective effort, one where we can be inspired by and learn from the ideas and practices of others.

Early discussions around decolonising the curriculum largely centred on conceptual debates — interrogating what decolonisation meant in a higher education context and whether it was needed. Fortunately, that debate has moved on from such reductive narratives, away from concerns of ‘erasing’ or ‘rewriting’ history. There is now broad agreement that DtC is needed, though reasoning for this varies, from: being a matter of social justice; a process of compliance with external regulatory frameworks; or an issue of epistemic justice concerned with inclusivity, academic integrity, and the need for a more complete global knowledge production process. These diverse motivations inform the decolonising journey experienced by individuals, disciplines, institutions, and regions. The chapters within this book capture multidisciplinary perspectives and efforts on navigating power, knowledge, and innovation in decolonising the curriculum.

This book has framed the different states of the decolonising journey as a tripartite liminal process starting with preliminal reflexivity, moving into liminal experimentation, with the ambition of arriving in a postliminal decolonising state with a shared responsibility to ensure that pedagogy remains forward-thinking and inclusive of diverse epistemologies. This journey through liminality has been demonstrated as an exercise of ongoing oscillation between traditional and emergent knowledge and practice. The chapters document how academics have navigated uncertainty to begin reimagining curricula, pedagogy, and institutional structures. From confronting biases to co-creating knowledge and embedding reflexive praxis, the contributions have highlighted both the precarity faced and the resilience needed for decolonising transformation. The experiences of the authors in this work make it clear that DtC is not an endpoint but a collective, innovative, and iterative practice - one that requires continuous effort, reflection, humility, dialogue, and community. The chapters, particularly in Part Two, illustrate decolonising liminality at the grassroots level, efforts centred around ideas of epistemic equity and justice.

Across the disciplines, authors demonstrated the ways that they have grappled with the pervasive nature of coloniality in higher education, questioning what is valued in their fields, and what is taught in their classrooms. This is well illustrated in the chapters that contend with: embedded colonial assumptions of knowledge production in disciplines such as international relations (Louden-Cooke & Jester, chapter 4), architecture (Putra, chapter 6) and criminology (Twyman-Ghoshal, El Masri & Dalton, chapter 11); the false neutrality ascribed to the sciences including computing (Allison, chapter 9) and biology (Lala, Kanwal, & Twyman, chapter 10), and; the external policy pressures that weigh on academic freedom (Scott-Baumann & Karim, chapter 5). The cases presented in this book highlight the universal importance of decolonising curricula, not just in the social sciences, arts, and humanities but also in science education (e.g. physics, chapter 3; biology, chapter 10) and in business schools (Afriye & Copland, chapter 7).

Together, the authors who contributed their work to this compilation illustrated techniques they used to move beyond theoretical critique, offering concrete examples of decolonising practices to develop epistemic justice, social equity, and intellectual integrity. The contributions of academics here make it clear that decolonising efforts can happen in a multitude of ways,

60 tailored to the unique histories and needs of the specific field, providing the reader with a variety
61 of examples and tools to embed in their own practices. The approaches included in this text have
62 spanned the liminal continuum, ranging from using historical approaches that make clear the link
63 between scientific developments and colonialism (physics, chapter 3; computing sciences,
64 chapter 9; biology, chapter 10), to interrogating the foundational works and canons of disciplines
65 (international relations, chapter 4; architecture, chapter 6; literature, chapter 8; criminology,
66 chapter 11; visual arts, chapter 12), to actively engaging students in reparative learning for social
67 justice (history, chapter 13; visual arts, chapter 12).

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69 In addition, the cases included have demonstrated that DtC requires more than reconstructing
70 subject-related content, needing transformative pedagogy that empowers students to become
71 active participants in the decolonising effort. Many of the authors have advocated and illustrated
72 approaches that foster critical thinking, reflexivity, and student agency, where traditional,
73 hierarchical models of teaching and learning are modified or upended. This has included
74 incorporating dialogic methods (Scott-Baumann & Karim, chapter 5), centering students' lived
75 experiences (Allison, chapter 9; Hall & Spooner, chapter 12), using creative and participatory
76 assignments (Hall & Spooner, chapter 12; O'Connell, chapter 13), embedding relational and
77 restorative classroom practices (Twyman-Ghoshal, El Masri, & Dalton, chapter 11), and
78 engaging with communities outside the university (O'Connell, chapter 13). However, the efforts
79 at the pedagogical level must be supported at the research and knowledge generation levels,
80 reaching through to appropriate research funding and publication of research (Shafi, chapter 2)
81 and require efforts across the entire higher education institution (Shafi, chapter 14; Afriyie,
82 Copland, and Shafi, chapter 15; Scott-Baumann & Karim, chapter 5). Without such concomitant
83 efforts, the work of dedicated pedagogues can only extend so far.

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85 That the overall decolonising journey has begun, and is moving forward, is hopeful. Coloniality
86 and its impacts evolved over centuries, when many countries were setting up formal sovereignty
87 and statehood, which contributed to the embedded coloniality within societal structures,
88 including those of higher education institutions and knowledge production. To dismantle these
89 requires sustained, committed, and collective efforts. It is important that decolonising efforts are
90 given the time and space to reach all the places in which coloniality permeates. Recognising this

91 will prevent people from feeling disillusioned and becoming disengaged. Coming together as a
92 community of scholars and educators committed to decolonising work is essential, as a means to
93 move towards epistemic justice until leaders of institutions, and the sector overall, provide the
94 full support that is required. At present, as outlined in this book, much of the work is being
95 forged through the determination and perseverance of academics passionate about DtC.
96 However, such work must not rely on the labour of passionate academics; there is an urgent need
97 for academia, across research, publication, and leadership, to reflect knowledge from across the
98 world, from our shared human history, and diverse knowledge bases and traditions.
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100 This book is a step towards a decolonised future for higher education.