Reimagining the Social Sciences

Decolonising the curriculum

Results from the Decolonising the Social Sciences Curricula Project

A collaborative research zine exploring how students and staff understand, experience, and practice decolonising the curriculum.

MONASH WARWICK ALLIANCE
UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
MONASH University
MONASH University MALAYSIA

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The Monash Australia team acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which this work was undertaken — the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded and that these lands always were and always will be Aboriginal land. We pay our deep respects to the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung Elders, past, present, and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We also honour the contributions of Indigenous staff and students who participated in the Australia-based workshops, whose insights and presence have shaped this project.

We acknowledge the Orang Asli peoples, whose traditional knowledge and deep understanding of the lands of Peninsular Malaysia have shaped this region for millennia. As Monash Malaysia is situated on these lands, we recognise the importance of their perspectives in our research and commit to conducting our work with respect for their cultural protocols and wisdom.

Why This project?

Universities across the world are increasingly engaging with calls to decolonise the curriculum.

These conversations raise important questions: Whose knowledge counts? Which voices are centred in teaching? How do histories of colonialism (continue to) shape academic disciplines?

This project explored how students and staff understand and experience efforts to decolonise the Social Sciences curriculum.

Through creative and participatory methods, we created spaces for reflection, dialogue, and imagination.

A Workbook

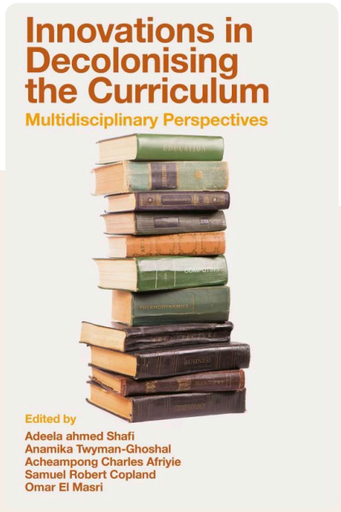
HOW TO START DECOLONISING SOCIAL SCIENCES

Stefania Paredes Fuentes
Mahek Bhatia
Alero Etuwewe
Ivanne Gnaoure
Caitlin Hoyland
dipbuk Panchal

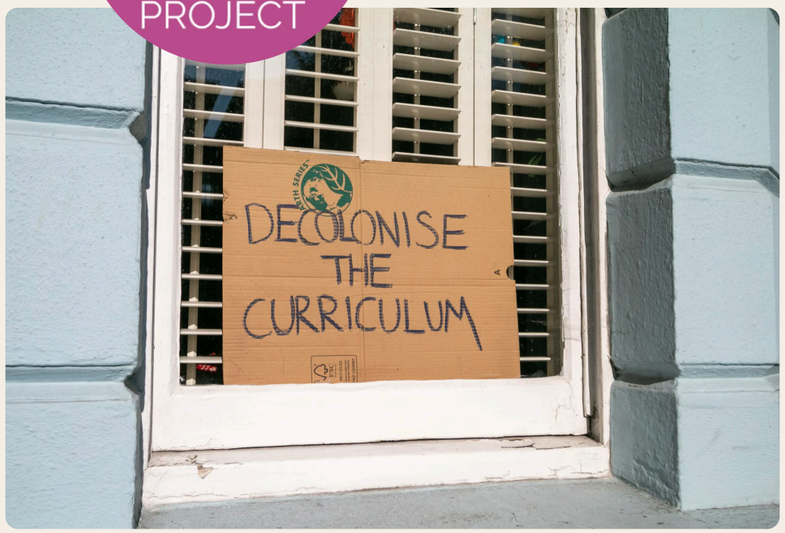


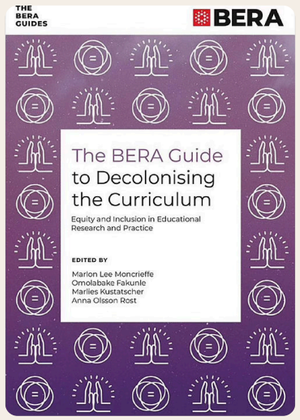
DECOLONISE UKC
THROUGH THE KALEIDOSCOPE





WARWICK DECOLONISE PROJECT





MANCHESTER DECOLONISE THE CURRICULUM

project AiMS

Explore how students and staff understand decolonising the curriculum

Identify experiences of inclusion, exclusion, and representation in teaching materials

Experiment with creative research methods that express ideas beyond traditional academic formats

Generate insights for future curriculum development

our approach

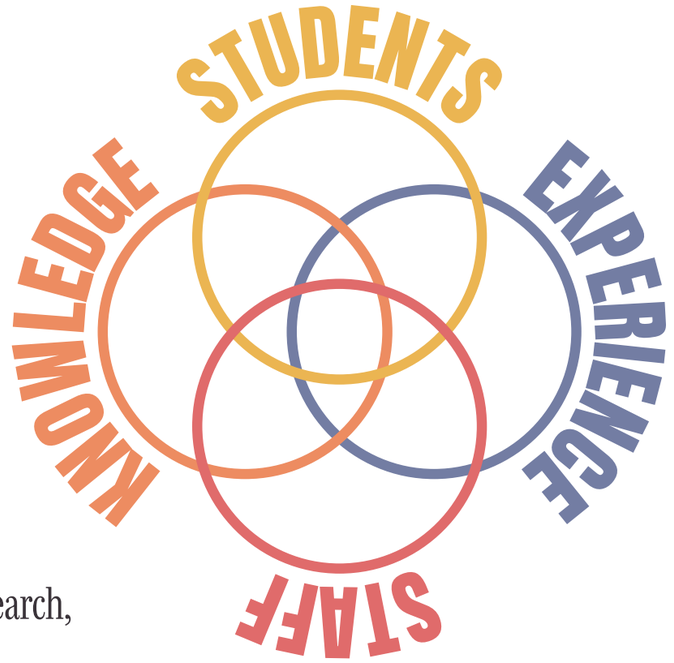
The project adopted creative and participatory qualitative methods.

Participants were invited to reflect on their experiences of the curriculum through creative activities and discussions.

The research emphasised:

Participation / Reflexivity

Collaborative knowledge production



These principles are closely aligned with decolonial approaches to research, which challenge hierarchical forms of knowledge production.

zine making as method

One of the key methods used in the project was zinemaking.

WHY ZINES?

Zines are small, self-published booklets often created using:

collage
drawings
handwritten text
cut-and-paste layouts





"Zine making is accessible for people who don't consider themselves arty... it's a good way to funnel [that] anger"

– Whipbird, Student

Historically, zines have been used by activists and marginalised communities to express ideas outside mainstream publishing.

In this project, zines allowed participants to:

Express complex feelings about the curriculum (providing a safe space to "funnel" anger, disappointment, and disillusionment with the academic institutions)

Reflect creatively on representation and knowledge, using simple tools that do not require "sophisticated" artistic skills

Experiment with alternative academic voices

who took part?

The project brought together students and members of staff from across the Social Sciences at Warwick, Melbourne, and KL.

Participants shared reflections on:

Colonial practices, identifying systemic bias, Western dominance, and the erasure of local identities.

Decolonial practices, highlighting pedagogical experiences that actively challenge colonial norms.

Tensions between academic theory (e.g., anti-capitalism) and academic institutional practices or ethics (such as university investments in weapons manufacturers).

Ways forward to decolonising the curricula

Personal narratives connecting personal or national identity to the global imperial legacies, local settler-colonial contexts or migration.

student voices

Students emphasised the importance of seeing diverse perspectives represented in their courses.

Key reflections included:

Greater visibility of scholars from the Global South

Discussions of colonial histories shaping contemporary societies

Opportunities for critical debate about knowledge production

Address the “heartless neutrality” found in the social sciences, where students learn about atrocities but are given no space to process the emotional reality of a “world breaking down”.

"your jargon is exclusionary and a point like to talk to communities like sociology is meant to advocate for the people. You need to like talk to the people and be in conversation with the people, so like talk in plain languages um talk to communities....." (Student)

"academia is often quite black and white" (Student)

"Because I feel like if we are wanting to decolonize knowledge, like What does that actually look like? And I feel like that's a very big question because we've never really experienced it before. But there's definitely ways that we could improve it. We just don't have the full picture." (Student)

"maybe teaching how to agree to disagree at times. I think that's a very core component that arts in Malaysia is missing." (Student)

"you will never decolonize within a colonial institution. Yeah, work undertakes research for and invest in corporations funding atrocities. Your revolutionary research is only allowed if it falls within the constraints of colonial norms." (Student)

"Can knowledge be decolonial? I think decolonization is the sharing of knowledges and privilege, and like sharing of knowledges as well as the ways of knowing, being and doing that have been denied quality or recognition of visibility or value or centering within a colonial system. That's how I feel about it." (Student)

"Because I feel like if we are wanting to decolonize knowledge, like What does that actually look like? And I feel like that's a very big question because we've never really experienced it before. But there's definitely ways that we could improve it. We just don't have the full picture." (Student)

"It talks a lot about parliamentary sovereignty and how the Parliament or the Supreme Court is like the supreme authority in the UK. But it doesn't really talk much about representation in the parliament or even in the Supreme Court itself. It's a lot of like, you can see a very obvious bias, but it isn't really addressed in the module " (Student)

"I guess education and the social sense wasn't always thinking about decolonial. It was following a very colonial and westernized thought." (Student)



Students also expressed a strong interest in participatory forms of learning that encourage dialogue and reflection.

"You do 12 weeks of content, and you have one hour or two-hour lecture on [First Nations hyper-incarceration]"

– Student

"Your essays will not set you free... if you don't act on it, it's pointless"

– Student

"Your heartless neutrality helps no one... no one's given space to feel like, oh my god guys, the world is breaking down"

– Student

Students on Representation

Many students highlighted that reading lists still rely heavily on a relatively narrow set of authors and traditions.

"Marx, Durkheim and Weber will have multiple lectures dedicated to them, whereas Du Bois is just one kind of push to the side, I felt"

– Student

Students suggested:

- Expanding the geographical diversity of scholarship.
- Integrating perspectives from historically marginalised communities.
- Creating opportunities for students to contribute knowledge from their own experiences.

Across campuses, these concerns take different forms, but similar patterns emerge.

MORE VOICES

MORE PERSPECTIVES

MORE KNOWLEDGE



STAFF PERSPECTIVES

Staff recognised the importance of engaging with decolonising debates but also described practical challenges in implementing curricular change.

These included:

Limited time for curriculum redesign
Uncertainty about appropriate resources
The need for institutional support

At the same time, staff expressed a strong interest in developing new teaching practices.
"Positionality as Action"

Move from "practical challenges" to the deeper ethical reflections

Critique of the "Diversity Bucket" — glossy brochures
that miss the reality of diverse lives

Staff reflected on the "linearity of thinking" as a colonised trait
and the need to move positionality from a "noun" (an identity)
to an "action" (a responsibility in the classroom).

"Maybe it's less a noun and an identity position and more an action... acknowledge that I'm a coloniser" (Staff)

Distinguish between the "ethics of research" (following protocols) and the
"ethics of life" (actual care for participants)

"Then there's classroom space, never addressed, never decolonised, simply focused to be the knowledge reproduced. Here I am in the room surrounded by white men and listening to white women do what they do, take up space, breaking white solidarity, yes I know I am, racism, reproduce whiteness of bodies and systems, imposed, turned, returned, never upturned, critiqued, silenced, improbable, never breaking, never brown, never black, always white, white, leave white, whiteness, writing me, holding me down like a rock."

— Mouse (Mel Staff)

Warwick
Questioning the System

At Warwick, students showed a strong commitment to critical thinking, but also a deep frustration with its limits.

"Whose wisdom? Who's knowledge? Who's expertise?" (Student)

Students valued moments where teaching encouraged them to question dominant perspectives and engage with Global South ideas.

what works

Critical seminars that question "objectivity"

Opportunities to compare perspectives across contexts

Creative and participatory learning spaces

what doesn't

Token inclusion of alternative thinkers

A curriculum still centred on Western frameworks

A disconnect between critical theory and real-world action

"Your essays will not set you free." (Student)

For many, learning felt incomplete without action, emotion, or collective engagement.

Key Tension

Critical awareness of the many social systems without structural change.

Monash Melbourne
Between Knowledge and Action

In Melbourne, conversations were shaped by the realities of settler colonialism and the ongoing marginalisation of First Nations peoples.

"Always was, always will be Aboriginal land." (Staff)

Participants emphasised that decolonisation must go beyond symbolic gestures.

what works

Inclusion of Indigenous scholarship and perspectives

Teaching that recognises positionality and lived experience

Staff advocacy and efforts to diversify content

what doesn't

Indigenous issues reduced to a single lecture

"Diversity" framed as branding or strategy

Institutional contradictions (teaching critique without structural change)

"We don't do diversity because it's woke, we do diversity because it's good business." (Student)

Key Tension

Decolonial teaching within institutions is still shaped by colonial structures.

Monash Malaysia
Negotiating Multiple Worlds

In Malaysia, participants navigated overlapping knowledge systems – Western, regional, and local.

"I didn't realise I was that westernised before I came to Malaysia and studied at Monash. Because usually what I read in Japan is Western-centric from a Japanese perspective. But here, we do things from a Southeast Asian view, and it's different from me." (Student)

Students and staff highlighted tensions between imported curricula and local realities.

what works

Reflexive teaching that encourages questioning frameworks

Engagement with postcolonial and regional perspectives

Dialogue across languages, cultures, and experiences

what doesn't

Teaching materials reused across campuses without localisation

Limited visibility of Malaysian and Southeast Asian knowledge

Ongoing dominance of Western academic frameworks

"Rather than we focus on decolonisation, we should focus on how to restructure yourself." (Student)

Key Tension

Balancing global knowledge with local histories and identities.

Across Campuses
Different Contexts, Shared Struggles

Across both students and staff, and across locations, several themes emerged in the struggle to decolonise:

Decolonising the curriculum is understood as an ongoing process, not a single reform

Meaningful change requires dialogue between students and staff

Representation alone is not enough

Students want space for emotion, dialogue, and action

Creative and participatory methods can open new ways of thinking about knowledge

Institutions struggle to match critique with change

"Define decolonisation not just as a reform, but as the "sharing of knowledges and privilege" to enable a "collective humanity"" (Student).

Decolonisation is the sharing of knowledges and privilege... that have been denied quality or recognition or visibility" (Student)

"Decolonising is a very long process." (Student)

Looking forwArd

"The Decolonial To-Do List"

The project highlights the importance of continuing conversations about how Social Sciences curricula can better reflect the diversity of global knowledge.

Future efforts might include:

Collaborative curriculum design (and consulting with marginalised and local communities)

Expanding reading lists and teaching materials (letting students find and bring their own texts to seminars)

Experimenting with creative and participatory learning practices, integrating lived experience to validate individual experiences instead of just relying on peer-reviewed literature

Training staff to facilitate discussion rather than "sermonizing" from a single stance

Practice radical transparency by sharing the privilege of education with the wider community

Decolonising the curriculum is not about replacing one canon with another, but about expanding conversations about knowledge.

"You can't just teach content. You need to teach action. The university can't decolonise anything internally if it doesn't decolonise the position it takes in the world" (Student)

Join The Conversation

We invite you to continue reflecting on these questions and to share your perspectives in our project blog.

You could share:

A reflection on your learning or teaching

A reading recommendation

An example of inclusive curriculum practice

An idea for change

Scan this QR Code
to visit the project blog

This is a site for “raw collages” and continued “angry rants”

Our People



Dr Matt Maycock Senior Lecturer
Criminology Department
Monash University
matt.maycock@monash.edu

Dr Silvia Gomes Associate Professor
Sociology Department
University of Warwick
silvia.gomes@warwick.ac.uk

Dr Thaatchaayini Kananatu Senior Lecturer
Global Studies at the School of Arts and Social Sciences
Monash University Malaysia
thaatchaayini.kananatu@monash.edu

Dr Anastasia Chamberlen Professor of Sociology
Sociology Department
University of Warwick
a.chamberlen@warwick.ac.uk

Dipbuk Panchal PhD Candidate/ Senior GTA Criminology
Sociology Department
University of Warwick
dipak.panchal@warwick.ac.uk

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More importantly, we are extremely grateful to all participants who took part in this research project. Their ideas, experiences, questions, disagreements, and reflections made this project what it is. Together, we explored the possibilities, tensions, and challenges of decolonising the social sciences curriculum, and the conversations were as inspiring as they were thought-provoking.

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For more information about the project, visit the webpage
warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/clusters/vsj/monashwarwick

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