



**Critiquing Inclusion at
the Neoliberal University:
An Analysis of Decoloniality
& A Manifesto for
Doing Decolonial Work**

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Front cover

On Thursday 9th December 2010 in London, England, students protested against an increase in higher education fees and were met with police violence. The proposed bill went through, it tripled the price of university fees for students enrolled in 2012 from £3,290 to £9,000. I was one of these students.

Photo credit: Karen Prinsloo.

Source: <https://www.karelprinsloo.com/europe/london-student-protest>

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Abstract

This research focuses on decoloniality and how to do decolonial work at the university to make it a space that is founded on inclusion and social justice. I conducted interviews with feminist scholars from different geo-political locations to understand what it means to do decolonial work in higher education institutions during my internship with RINGS in 2021. I analyse the data thematically to draw upon patterns and similarities, and selected because of the data, I focus on four axes for analysis: race, gender, class and (dis)ability. The fundamental understanding of doing decolonial work is the inherent challenge to hegemonic power structures which have remained in place since the official end of colonial administrations across the world and how these structures continue to oppress marginalised students at the university. I critique the university as a site of inclusion to show how thinking differently by adopting a feminist ethics of care approach and an intersectional lens may hold a path for restructuring the university built on inclusion. There are three domains to my analysis: teaching and knowledge production, access to the university, and ethics and care. Through these, I argue that decolonial work must involve a greater representation of marginalised communities, an increase in self-reflexive methods to understand our accountability in perpetuating social injustice, and a deeper engagement with those who have been oppressed by coloniality. Through envisioning the marginalised in relation to ourselves, we re-humanise oppressed bodies to generate caring relations which may lead to a way of thinking differently and restructuring the university as a site of inclusion. Finally, I show that we must find ways of thinking differently and restructuring the university as an institution founded upon social justice if we are to ever envision a future liberated from oppression.

Keywords: decoloniality, social justice, oppression, exclusion/inclusion, the university, students, intersectionality

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Introduction

Calls to decolonise the university have erupted across the globe in the twenty-first century and protest movements have demanded an end to social injustice and discrimination at the university (Choudry and Vally 2020). The demands are certainly not uniform but stem from the fundamental understanding that hegemonic power structures continue to marginalise oppressed communities and prevent their inclusion into the university on equal grounds. This perpetuation of exclusion is termed coloniality (Quijano 2000) which shows that, despite the official end of colonial administrations across the world in the twentieth-century, structural discrimination and social injustice still exist at the university today. Student protests have shone a light on the deep injustices that remain prevalent at the institution and, as students, are equipped to generate a political ‘pulse’ in countries across the world (Toscano 2011). This thesis is a direct contribution to student demands to decolonise the university. It is vital we address deep coloniality if we are ever to envision a different future for the university, one that does not perpetuate structural oppression and social injustice, but that resists and actively combats it, one that is founded upon inclusion.

My interest in doing decolonial work was sparked by a racist incident at Utrecht University (UU) in 2020. A friend and peer on the Gender Studies program was victim to racial hatred from another student. After extensive discussions with the MA Gender Studies cohort and staff about the consequences of such behaviour, emotions ran high over the difficulty to obtain appropriate punishment for the perpetrator. My friend began the multi-faceted bureaucratic process at the university to receive equitable justice however, as the process continued over many months, my friend’s energy was waning and other issues took precedent.¹ In order to understand how social injustice exists at the university, I was drawn to decolonial thought to theorise what had happened and to support my critique through academic texts. The topic of decoloniality is relevant to my context as challenges to UU’s policies and procedures continue

¹ The emotional tiredness of experiencing the university as a marginalised subject is termed by William Smith (2003) as ‘racial battle fatigue’. He shows the psychosocial and physiological symptoms that racialised subjects experience at university because of institutional and structural racism. The subliminal effects of racial battle fatigue affect students in different ways, some include frustration, shock, anger, disappointment, resentment, anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness, and fear (Smith et al.; 2016). Social injustice at the university, then, can be inherently linked to mental well-being (an invisible disability) and ‘success’ in intellectual and academic endeavours.

at the time I am writing this thesis that demand to ‘Make UU Safe Now’.² Doing decolonial work means challenging a system that does a disservice to students, a system that needs to accept accountability and responsibility for exclusive structures and asks that it actively works toward eradicating oppressive relations within the institution. Whilst I critique the university as an object for engagement, it is with awareness that I am asking for a transformation of an institution to which I am working from within. My positionality as a student, as an ‘unruly subject’ (Vijayan 2020), is important because it emphasises the attachment I have to the university as a place of academic freedom where I am armed with the tools for critical engagement. On the other hand, doing decolonial work through critical theory is vital to me because of how I have witnessed and felt alienation as a marginalised subject at university.

Furthermore, my internship with RINGS³ shaped this thesis as I conducted interviews with feminist scholars from across the world on decolonising the university. The insights that they shared were so rich and valuable that my interest in decolonial thought deepened and I chose to explore decoloniality further in this thesis. My internship research (see Appendix III) and this thesis complement one another as they stem from the same interviews, but explore different areas.

Whilst calls to decolonise implicitly suggest that decolonialisation is an endpoint, it is important to highlight that I do not utilise the term ‘decolonise’ to suggest that we can exist or even achieve in a fully ‘decolonised’ university. My purposeful selection to use the present continuous tense ‘doing’ is to encapsulate the concept of decolonial work as a process and not a final product. We must be in a continual state of reflection to understand and build upon notions of social inclusion. The sections that follow are divided thematically to emphasise the different domains of decolonial work, but their division is not to argue that these areas are separate, but that each is intrinsically embedded within the next and one cannot be implemented without others. Decolonial work is, at the very heart, intersectional. The many tentacles of decolonial work are illustrated and analysed, though certainly not limited to this thesis, but must be understood in relation to one another, as belonging to the same body.

² A petition was started on Change.org in April 2021 demanding that the Executive Board of UU address issues in the complaint’s procedure after an incident of sexual harassment. My witness to racism adds to the ‘pile’ of discrimination that continues to take place at the university. My friend has, after three months, for now, postponed taking her complaint further, but it forced me to ask: who else has dropped their complaint? How many people, like my friend, are tired of reliving their experience after attending meeting after meeting, fighting to receive justice? What is the university *actually* doing to address social discrimination and what is invisibilised?

³ The International Research Association of Institutions of Advanced Gender Studies.

Research Questions

The main research question for this thesis is: *how can we decolonise the university as an institution that is built on exclusion?*

The following sub-questions have guided my analysis:

- To what extent can we achieve a ‘decolonised’ university?
- How does the university replicate social inequalities and how do they intersect?
- What does it mean to ‘do’ decolonial work at the neoliberal university?

Chapter Outline

In chapter one, I outline the theoretical frameworks for my analysis: decolonial thought, a feminist ethics of care approach and disability studies. I delve deeply into how the latter two complement decolonial theory to support our process of rehumanising marginalised communities by viewing relations with the Other through ourselves, and to better understand disability as an axis that has been relatively unexplored in decolonial work when compared to race, gender and class.

In chapter two, I explore the methods and methodology of my thesis. I interviewed four feminist scholars from different geo-political locations whilst completing an internship with RINGS. I asked about their personal experiences in doing decolonial work and whether they believed it was possible in their context. I analysed patterns and similarities between the interview data thematically and divided it into parts to breakdown the different domains of decolonial work, as shown in the following three chapters.

Chapter three begins the analysis of decolonial work under teaching and knowledge production. It includes a critical analysis of curriculum change, epistemology, methodology and language. In chapter four, I analyse the ways that access to the university limits how marginalised bodies experience the institution. Access is further divided into four sub-sections: physical space and environment, physical space and (dis)ability, economic/financial access and community involvement. Last, in chapter five, I focus on ethics and care at the university. The three

sections analyse decolonial work as emotional labour, the transformation of policies and procedures including a close reading of UU's code of conduct, and the need to listen to students.

Within each chapter, I explore the intersectional nature of decolonial work by focusing on four axes (race, gender, class and (dis)ability), selected because of the qualitative data that I gathered. I argue how, at every intersection, decolonial work fundamentally challenges historically accepted norms, that have endured since the official end of colonialism in the twentieth century, and confronts hegemonic power structures that continue to oppress the marginalised. Doing decolonial work is crucial to social inclusion at the university and certainly not limited to the sections that I outline. Decolonial work requires thinking differently, reimagining relations to nurture inclusion and to ensure the prevail of social justice. It concerns everyone and it is an issue we must address now.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Frameworks

My thesis is framed by decolonial theory, a feminist ethics of care approach and disability studies. First, I outline the elements of decolonial thought that are fundamental to understand how the university has historically (re)produced exclusionary ideologies and upheld violent colonial practices that dehumanise marginalised communities. As Nadira Omarjee (2018) shows us, dehumanisation is inextricably intertwined with the project of coloniality (Omarjee 2018; 83), therefore doing decolonial work must involve *re*humanisation. The power relations inherent to the university space are inescapable, and this is where a feminist ethics of care is useful as it frames the need to rehumanise the Other in the academy. I argue that the university has a role of responsibility in ‘taking care’ of its students to build a community that is based on mutual recognition which gives the Other access to the university. My decolonial and ethics of care framework is enhanced by disability studies, which complements the frame of decolonial thought on disability exclusion and how it continues to be the most marginalised area at the university (Davis 2006). The inclusion of disability studies as a separate theory highlights the need to further explore disability as a category for analysis within decolonial thought, and I attempt to bridge the gap between the two.

Decolonial Theory

First and foremost, what do I mean by ‘decolonial’? Scholars in decolonial thought situate the term and contextualise the concept differently⁴ (Andrews 2018; Appleton 2019; Fanon 1961; Icaza and Vázquez 2018; Lugones 2010; Mbembe 2016; Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Smith 1999; Tuck and Yang 2012). It is therefore important to outline some of the nuances in decolonial theory to situate my research and to show how I utilise decoloniality in my analysis.

For Achille Mbembe, decolonial work in South Africa is ‘not new’ and since the 1960s and 1970s, calls to decolonise have been synonymous with ‘to Africanize’ and part of a ‘nation-building project’ that has attempted to rid South Africa of ‘Westernization’ (Mbembe 2016;

⁴ See also edited books by: Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial and Kerem Nişancıoğlu (eds.) 2018. *Decolonising the University*. London: Pluto Press; and Aziz Choudry and Salim Vally (eds.) 2020. *The University and Social Injustice. Struggles Across the Globe*. London: Pluto Press, for a comprehensive view of ‘decolonial’ work being locally contextualised.

33). The Western canon dominates African epistemologies, leading to Eurocentric hegemony that ‘disregards other epistemic traditions’ (ibid.; 32) and upholds colonial relations as normative. However, Mbembe critiques the move to ‘Africanize’ and cites Frantz Fanon, who warned of the national middle-class bourgeoisie preventing authentic self-determination of African nations and becoming ‘anti-national...which is stupidly, contemptibly, cynically bourgeois’ (Fanon 1961; 121). Fanon further shows that the national bourgeoisie, taking up official government posts of the ex-colonisers, continue to fight for ‘the notion of nationalization and Africanization of the ruling classes’ (ibid.; 125). This move demands all foreigners leave the nation, beginning with Europeans, the bourgeoisie then attempt to repel non-national Africans, thus, battles break out between African tribes. He says, ‘from nationalism we have passed to ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism’ (ibid.). The departure of Western colonial administrations leaves a space for a new leadership in native societies which maintain colonial ideology. With a strong critique of ‘decolonization-as-Africanization’ (Mbembe 2016; 34) from Fanon, Mbembe shows us that in a South African context, calls to decolonise must not be synonymised with Africanisation. Their analysis highlights how doing decolonial work is about a fundamental restructuring of society, it shows us that we cannot replicate what came before, but that decolonisation demands thinking and doing differently.

Linda Tuhwai Smith (1999) situates decolonial work from an indigenous perspective, she warns researchers and academics from entering indigenous communities to conduct research that harms indigenous people and maintains a discourse of the coloniser who ‘offends the deepest sense of...[indigenous] humanity’ (Smith 1999; 1). Our role as researchers undertaking projects amongst marginalised communities must not reproduce oppressive relations where the researcher is removed from indigenous life as a member of the privileged class who produces research that continues to marginalise. Instead, Smith argues that decolonial work is about working *with* indigenous communities, sharing research ‘on’ and ‘about’ indigenous peoples *with* them, and creating research methodologies that do not harm participants and their communities. Her methodological and theoretical arguments address the need to rethink our ways of conducting research so that research projects may actually benefit those who are being researched. Doing decolonial work at the university, then, is about a need to reflect and rethink the ways that we conduct research so we are accountable for what we do.

Nayantara Appleton (2019) positions her work within a settler colonial context, arguing that ‘decolonial’ work can only take place within an indigenous context. She states that using the term ‘decolonise’ in the academy has become ‘hollow’ and ‘does a disservice to the amazing indigenous scholarship and activist work that is targeting power structures to shake and reshape them to accommodate indigeneity’.⁵ Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang’s (2012) argument concurs with Appleton’s, and they argue that for universities to adopt ‘decolonisation’ is not decolonial because it does not involve repatriating land and ceded resources.⁶ They state that ‘decolonisation cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks’ (Tuck and Yang 2012; 3). We must redefine what we mean when we use the term ‘decolonial’ else we ‘recentre whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future’ (ibid.). With their warning in mind, I argue there is much that can still be utilised in decolonial work outside of a settler colonial context. The term decolonisation ties together a broader challenge that takes into consideration power relations and power structures that continue to exist in ‘post’-colonial sites.⁷ Understanding how coloniality exists in settler colonial nations and ‘post’-colonial sites is central to this thesis, as I attempt to deconstruct some of the ways that power relations continue to marginalise the Other at the university. The need to move beyond Tuck and Yang’s limited definition is derived from my motivation to move past limitations so that we can enact transformation.⁸ I do not advocate for a move entirely separate from their definition, but utilise their specific, single-focused definition of decoloniality

⁵ Nayantara Appleton. 2019. ‘Do Not “Decolonize” . . . If You Are Not Decolonizing: Progressive Language and Planning Beyond a Hollow Academic Rebranding.’ *Critical Ethnic Studies Journal*. University of Minnesota Press. Last accessed: 4th June 2021. <http://www.criticalethnicstudiesjournal.org/blog/2019/1/21/do-not-decolonize-if-you-are-not-decolonizing-alternate-language-to-navigate-desires-for-progressive-academia-6y5sg>

⁶ I explore this concept further in chapter four to argue that if decolonisation can only be understood in a settler colonial context, then we also need to consider what else was brought over by settlers. Maria Lugones (2008) shows us that land and resources were not the only elements in society that were completely maimed, but the notion of gender and the import of patriarchal relations were also brought over by the colonisers.

⁷ I define ‘post’-colonial nations as any nation (ex-coloniser or ex-colonised) that exists after the official end of colonial administrations, especially in the later part of the twentieth century. For example, Britain and India may both be seen as ‘post’-colonial nations as British colonialism in India officially ended in 1947. Furthermore, I use apostrophes to sandwich ‘post’ to denote the temporal limitations of such nations being ‘post’-colonial and how imperialism and neocolonialism still exist within these sites, such that hierarchical colonial relations are maintained. Hence, ‘post’-colonial nations may be ‘post’ in terms of the eradication of official colonial administrations, but the power relations between nations that continue to exist today are imperialist and neocolonial, and remodel oppressive colonial relations thus making ‘post’-colonial nations not truly ‘post’ at all.

⁸ My internship research component (see Appendix III) showed how the term ‘decolonial’ changes meaning given its context. Similarly, I used Tuck and Yang’s definition of decolonial work and how it is about repatriating land and resources. I argued to move beyond this definition in order to continue arguing against ‘decolonial work’ becoming co-opted by the university and neoliberal management. However, in this thesis, I argue that we do not need to necessarily move beyond their definition because it highlights the power relations inherent of coloniality and how similar power relations exist within the university.

alongside other theoretical understandings to present how multi-faceted decolonial work at the university needs to be.

Speaking from a ‘post’-colonial site, Kehinde Andrews (2018) argues that decolonising the (British) university is not possible without drastic structural changes; doing diversity work and adding Black Studies to the curriculum ‘does not change the nature of the university system’ (Andrews 2018; 139). He argues that the university system is, by nature, exclusionary, and ‘so long as the system of higher education retains its role in creating the knowledge that reproduces a vastly unequal status quo, it can never truly be decolonised’ (ibid.). For Andrews, doing decolonial work means subverting the tools of the master in an attempt to colonise the master’s house for the purposes of the Black liberation struggle. He says that using the ‘relative position of privilege’ (ibid.; 140) as a marginalised subject within the academy means utilising the resources at the university to support those outside of it. His analysis is useful to this thesis because it highlights the need to critique our institutions, yet utilise their resources, in order to include marginalised communities and forces us to ask how we can best benefit those outside of academia in marginalised communities from our position ‘within’. Doing decolonial work is about understanding our positionality and the limitations of our actions, it is about reconstructing and reimagining power relations, and having an essential understanding to how we relate decolonial work to our communities.

Rosalba Icaza and Rolando Vázquez (2018) analyse and critically reflect upon the findings of a research report into diversity work co-led by themselves, Gloria Wekker, Marieke Sloopman, and Hans Jansen at the University of Amsterdam in 2016, predominantly focused on the diversity of people and knowledge.⁹ Icaza and Vázquez argue that decolonial work is not about *what* the university is, but in fact about *how* things are done that need to be questioned. Simply put: In what ways do we do research? What is being taught and what is not? How are the students learning? The authors state that, ‘the decolonisation of the university is a struggle to enrich our ways of teaching and learning by listening to the plurality of knowledges of the world. It is about the challenge of relating to difference as an opportunity to enrich our knowledge practices instead of relating to difference as something that has to be reduced,

⁹ Gloria Wekker, Marieke Sloopman, Rosalba Icaza, Hans Jansen and Rolando Vázquez. 2016. ‘Let’s Do Diversity. Report of the Diversity Commission. University of Amsterdam’. Last accessed: 15th June 2021. <https://www.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/uva/nl/over-de-uva/democratisering/commissie-diversiteit/1.-diversity-commission-report-2016-12-10.pdf>

moved out of sight or exhibited' (Icaza and Vázquez 2018; 122-123). So, in a Dutch 'post'-colonial context, decolonial work is about understanding Eurocentric, white-washed epistemologies and methodologies taught at the university and an attempt to understand power relations that exclude. Similar to Andrews, decolonial work is, for Icaza and Vázquez, about opening the university to communities that have been historically excluded. In doing this, space is made for a plural society that celebrates rather than oppresses difference and makes way for the transformation of the university into a space that is engaged with projects of environmental and social justice and inclusion.

I have shown some of the varied ways 'decolonial' has been understood and I draw on these nuances to show how decolonial work is founded on challenging power structures reliant upon exclusion to maintain the dominant-oppressed dichotomy. Madina Tlostanova and Walter D. Mignolo (2012) in their book, *Learning to Unlearn*, discuss two different regions but state on multiple occasions that the selection of geographical areas is not to provide a comparative study, but to analyse how these two regions have been affected by the same colonial matrix of power. The colonial matrix of power, a term first coined and developed by Anibal Quijano, describes the domains of society that are affected by coloniality. His analysis demonstrates the far-reaching impact of the matrix and how we cannot be outside of this framework. My research is therefore situated within the colonial matrix of power and this awareness strengthens my attempt to account for my positionality as a subject enrolled within a colonial institution. Tlostanova and Mignolo embed themselves, ourselves, within coloniality to argue that we are not separate observers and it is essential to work from within the 'colonial wound' to 'learn to unlearn imperial education' as this is the start of 'decolonial education' (Candau 2009; cf. Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012; 22). I attempt to begin precisely this 'decolonial education' by working from within a colonial institution. I continue the work of unpicking imperial education to explore the possibilities of how the university can facilitate inclusion. However, the inherent power relations of the university as a state institution that has been responsible for justifying colonialism and dehumanisation makes it difficult to understand whether decoloniality and the university can really marry.

A Feminist Ethics of Care Approach

Nadira Omarjee (2018) argues that ‘dehumanisation is part of the project of coloniality’ (Omarjee 2018; 83). Colonialism was justified by the colonisers through the concept of modernity. Modernity, argues Quijano (2000), was viewed by Western nations as a linear, evolutionary trajectory in which the colonisers had progressed further than colonised nations. The fact that colonised nations were ‘behind’ in the process of modernising legitimised the exploitation and oppression of native populations. The colonisers deemed Natives as not fully human, as ‘savages’ (Smith 1999; 25), that did not deserve equality or humane treatment. This justification validated the systems of domination that were used to organise hierarchical social relations based on Western notions of difference. Dehumanising practices began under colonialism, but they did not end with the official elimination of colonial administrations. Instead, they have persisted and continue to permeate society today – this is coloniality (Quijano 2000). The dehumanising framework perpetuates socially unjust relations in the university by not considering all bodies as equal. This is where a feminist ethics of care approach is most meaningful to my analysis, because I argue that a care approach toward ourselves and the Other can improve relations by rehumanising the Other to foster inclusion.

Virginia Held (1995) argues that a care perspective is necessary because ‘rationality and reason alone are deficient’ (Held 1995; 10) in understanding society. This is closely linked to modernity as, during the Age of Enlightenment, reason was denoted as crucial to scientific knowledge and bodily elements, such as emotions, were considered unsuitable for conducting research. Quijano (2000) states that in this period, ‘the concept of modernity refers solely to rationality, science, technology, and so on’ (Quijano 2000; 544) and that these concepts were ‘exclusively European products and experiences’ (ibid.; 542). Coloniality represses the body and emotion above reason and rationality and preserves colonial relations that dehumanise the Other. A care perspective is essential to the framework of decoloniality as it highlights the need ‘to preserve or promote an actual human relation between themselves and *particular others*. Persons in caring relations are acting for self-and-other together’ [italics in original] (Held 1995; 12). Taking a feminist ethics of care framework means extending the decolonial framework of rehumanising, it goes beyond it to achieve recognition between the university and the marginalised through caring relations. When we view ourselves in the Other, we are able to see the Other as fully human and as our equal (Omarjee 2018). This is key to a feminist ethics of care and essential to discourse on the process of ‘decolonising’ the university. Therefore, I employ a feminist ethics of care to complement the theory of decoloniality by

moving past the analysis of colonial *dehumanisation* to offer a step forward that *rehumanises* the excluded Other.

Additionally, Sibonokuhle Ndlovu (2021) takes a decolonial approach to humanness and argues that humanity has been labelled in terms of normativity by the hegemonic classes that constructs the Other as ‘subhuman’. She says that ordering and categorising individuals and groups is a form of dehumanisation because human experience cannot be universalised into a single uniform definition of ‘normal’. If, as Ndlovu says, identity labels are constructed by society, then decolonial work needs to be about society and social constructs, and not focused on the individual. Doing decolonial work is enhanced by a feminist ethics of care as it guides us toward rehumanising the Other and transforming social constructs that impose oppressive categories upon the marginalised. Remodelling our relations with one another founded upon humanness can be fulfilled through a feminist ethics of care approach that rehumanises the marginalised and allows us to view one another as equal.

Omarjee (2018) argues that to view the Other through a lens of ourselves, hierarchies and ideologies of supremacy are naturally abandoned because we are more capable of viewing our nuanced, complex vulnerabilities and strengths. It ‘brings us closer to accepting ourselves and others’ and ‘it does not mean a supremacy over other beings’ (Omarjee 2018; 14). This may generate community, support for one another, non-judgemental critiques, and belief in the true value of diversity and inclusivity. It is about ‘ensuring that everyone at the university is made to feel fully human and to engage with the university from a position of empowerment’ (ibid.; 39). By seeing our differences as strengths, we oppose notions of hierarchy and oppression to make the university a space built on *inclusion*. A feminist ethics of care approach complements decolonial theory which calls for a transformation of society into a space that prevents rather than perpetuates exclusion and oppression, and serves as a framework that might provide part of the solution to a decolonised institution. Held states that a care approach ‘is a radical ethic calling for a profound restructuring of society’ (Held 1995; 19). So, if decoloniality shows us that we need to restructure society, then a feminist ethics of care approach shows us a path to an alternative future that resists and rejects coloniality and exclusion.

Disability Studies

Through the interviews I conducted, I learnt about the field of disability studies and the limitations of (dis)ability as a category for analysis in decolonial theory. Lennard J. Davis (2006) explains, ‘we should not downplay the fact that disabilities are still often forgotten when the litany of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and so on are articulated.’ (Davis 2006; xiii). It is necessary for me to include disability studies as a theoretical framework to understand the tensions and similarities between (dis)ability and other axes of analysis that I explore in doing decolonial work at the university. My research into disability studies and critical disability studies has shown the extensive understandings of how disability is framed, and the deep tensions that exist within the field of scholarly work.¹⁰ Therefore, I will delineate how I understand the term ‘disability’, outline the social/political versus medical framework of disability and how my research incorporates this framework.

Disability has been understood as ‘something material and concrete, a physical or psychological condition’ (Linton 1998; 162). The Oxford English dictionary defines disability within the medical framework as ‘a physical or mental condition that means you cannot use a part of your body completely or easily, or that you cannot learn easily’.¹¹ Disability scholars (Charlton 1998; Davis 2006; Garland-Thomson 2002; Kafer 2013; Linton 1998; Wendell 1989) are critical of medical definitions and ‘reassign a meaning [to disability] that is consistent with a sociopolitical analysis’ (Linton 1998; 162). Disability studies demands not to be understood from a purely medical framework, but to show that people with disabilities experience systems of domination that ‘parallel the oppression of other groups’ (Charlton 1998; 218). As with race, gender and class, (dis)ability must be understood as a socio-political issue. Ndlovu (2021) argues that humans are labelled of ‘normal mind’ and ‘normal body’, those that are not ‘normal’ or able are considered ‘disabled’ and therefore ‘disabled’ is an identity label. She states that people with impairments are labelled as ‘disabled’, but it is not that their impairments disable them. It is lack of access to social and economic resources in which ‘they

¹⁰ I understand that there are significant differences between ‘traditional’ disability studies and critical disability studies, however outlining the differences between the two falls outside the scope of my research. Furthermore, as critical disability studies scholars emphasise (Kafer 2013; Linton 1998), there are many different types of disability and the parameters to which may change, but people with disabilities are united because of a collective affinity. Alison Kafer (2013) says that ‘people within each of these categories can all be discussed in terms of disability politics, not because of any essential similarities among them, but because all have been labelled as disabled or sick and have faced discrimination as a result’ (Kafer 2013; 11). Tracing the nuances behind the term ‘disability’ also falls outside the scope of this thesis, however I utilise ‘disability’ as a social construct that has been used by hegemonic classes to continue excluding people with disabilities, however disability may be defined.

¹¹ Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. 2021. ‘Disability (noun)’. Last accessed: 2nd May 2021. <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/disability?q=disability>

are stripped of their independent lives and framed as disabled, when it is society that disables them' (Ndlovu 2021; 76). Despite the complexities and nuanced understandings of 'disabled' and 'impaired', scholarly work in disability studies concur that people living with disabilities are limited by their social structures (Davis 2006; Dolmage 2017; Kafer 2013). Doing decolonial work needs to include disability as an axis to prevent invisibilising already marginalised voices and theories. To exclude (dis)ability is to enact coloniality that omits the experiences of the Other.

Decolonial theory and disability studies complement one another because they are political and striving for a transformation of society. Davis says, 'the exciting thing about disability studies is that it is both an academic field of inquiry and an area of political activity', (Davis 2006; xv) and my research aims to be precisely that: an academic thesis nestled on the frontlines of political activity that demands new ways of thinking. A lens of disability studies is crucial to taking this perspective, which also draws out the tensions between axes of oppression to better understand complexities of lived experiences. To ignore disability studies as a framework would mean that I embody the activist academic that Davis critiques: 'progressives in and out of academia may pride themselves on being sensitive to race or gender, but they have been "ableist" in dealing with the issue of disability' (ibid.). Doing decolonial work cannot be solely about the inclusion of *some* marginalised groups; its focus on the deep transformation of society needs to incorporate (dis)ability if a decolonised university is to ever be attainable. Disability studies as a theoretical framework emphasises how disability has not been explored enough in decolonial theory thus far. My objective is to show how theories of disability can be incorporated into decolonial thought in order to transform the university into an inclusive space.

Chapter 2: Methods and Methodology

In this chapter, I first complicate the university as an object for critical engagement by arguing that it is an object that deserves to be decolonised, not destroyed, because it provides space for academic freedom and critical engagement with society. I question the power that the university holds and, by being explicit about this power, appeal to the university to consider how this power is used. After, I outline interviewing as my research method and how the types of questions that I asked were typical of a feminist researcher seeking social justice. I analyse the four interviews that I conducted thematically to draw upon patterns and similarities in the data. Practising self-reflexivity is a central tenant to feminist research (Hesse-Biber 2006) so I am explicit about my positionality to show accountability and stronger objectivity (Harding 1991).

The University: An Object for Critical Engagement

In critiquing the university as an institution that excludes certain bodies, it is important to discuss why I argue to decolonise the university and what makes it worth ‘saving’. I am aware that I appeal to the power of the institution to transform, and hence delegate a great degree of power to the university, whilst also stating that the university uses this power in a way that reproduces inequalities. It is, then, important to understand how I understand the ‘university’ as an object for critical engagement.

The university is an object I am personally attached to, it is a space that I want to inhabit and it is not an object that I want to destroy. It is a space that makes it possible to produce critical thinking and for academic freedom. We are drawn to the university to learn, to engage in knowledge production and to explore and question supposed ‘truths’. The historical legacy of the university is entangled with colonial structures and a colonial history, this can never be changed.¹² But with a decolonial lens, I argue that the university can be transformed into a space that is inclusive. We must continue critiquing the institutions that we are a part of to

¹² Kehinde Andrews (2018), Ramón Grosfoguel (2013), Patricia Hill-Collins (1986), Achille Mbembe (2001), Linda Tuhwai Smith (1999), Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial and Kerem Nişancıoğlu (2018), show us that the university, academics and researchers have been responsible for upholding colonial relations that continue to marginalise the oppressed.

ensure transformation, to ensure development, and we must not take our *inclusion* for granted. Decolonisation is not about an endpoint, it is a process that will take time, it warrants wilful patience, undoubtable persistence and strength.

Universities across the world have been subject to attack from political authorities that attempt to silence and limit the actions and power of the university as an institution.¹³ It is not new that authoritarian governments have banned or attempt to curtail the power of the university.¹⁴ As a site of academic freedom, the university and its students have the potentiality and possibility to be armed with tools to challenge extremist ideologies and this is why authoritarian governments place restrictions on them.¹⁵ Collette Cann and Eric DeMeulenaere (2020) argue that ‘social theory, specifically critical theory, is an incredible tool to social consciousness’ (Cann and DeMeulenaere 2020; 6). Consequently, it is unsurprising that universities are seen as a dangerous site for social activism and how protest movements calling to decolonise the university have been predominantly led by students.¹⁶ To position myself directly within this social cohort, as a student advocating for transformation, I must also be explicit about the fact that I am attached to the institution as a space that can provide me with the knowledge and tools to resist oppression. Universities as a space of critical thinking thus become dangerous sites of social consciousness and students learn the tools in which to challenge social injustice. This is why the university is worthy of saving and this is why I am invested in its transformation.

Reflections on Positionality

¹³ Brendan O’Malley. 2020. ‘Over 9,000 victims of violent attacks on higher education’. Last accessed: 6th May 2021. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200710150714503>.

¹⁴ Michael Ignatieff. 2018. ‘The role of universities in an era of authoritarianism’. Last accessed: 6th May 2021. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20180413093717351>.

¹⁵ In Aziz Choudry and Salim Vally’s (2020) *The University and Social Justice*, they outline the ways that students have challenged policy change and resisted reform, and how students have often been met with violence from the authorities. They argue that students are protecting progressive space, which is under threat from extremist ideologies, and how this space must be continually protected as a ‘public good, sphere of critical democratic citizenry, and resistance against commercial and corporate values that shape the form, purpose and mission of our institutions’ (Choudry and Vally 2020; 12). The imperative of the authorities must be countered if we want to achieve a decolonised university that is designed to include, not exclude.

¹⁶ Dan Hodgkinson and Luke Melchiorre. 2019. ‘Africa’s student movements: history sheds light on modern activism’. Last accessed: 6th May 2021. <https://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/content/africas-student-movements-history-sheds-light-modern-activism>; Sadhvi Dar, Manali Desai and Clive Nwonka. 2020. “‘Students want to confront it’ academics on how to decolonise the university”. Last accessed: 6th May 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jun/17/students-want-to-confront-it-academics-on-how-to-decolonise-the-university>

By reflecting upon my positionality and the power dynamics involved being a mixed race, able-bodied, middle-class, academic woman, I try to do research in a state of self-reflexivity because understanding our politics of location is, as Adrienne Rich (1984) shows us, a way toward accountability and a struggle against universalising and generalising lived experiences. By understanding where I am situated politically, I understand the shape and form of my relations with other political subjects that identify in different or similar ways to me. Rich positions herself within the world according to where she is from and I do the same in order to understand the circles of situatedness (the colonial matrix?) that I embedded within. The purpose is to delineate where I am writing from to show that decolonial work is locally situated and also located transnationally.

Self-reflexivity is a key theoretical tool to understand how our research and knowledge is partial and not objective. Sandra Harding (1991) states that all knowledge is marked by its origin and that by rejecting the disclosure of one's politics of location is to make false claims about universal knowledge. She says that Western sciences and models of knowledge have led to economic development but that this has 'also led to the simultaneous de-development and continual re-creation of "others" – Third world peoples, women, the poor, nature' (Harding 1991; ix). To avoid continued marginalisation, I utilise self-reflexive methods to understand where I am positioned within the world and to disclose what makes my knowledge partial. Gillian Rose (1997) says that self-reflexivity is the 'means of avoiding the false neutrality and universality of so much academic knowledge' that has historically continued to exclude the marginalised.¹⁷ Self-reflexive methods are essential to (feminist) research to understand power relations and social structures that permeate and frame our lived experiences, and how we must be accountable for the knowledge that we produce.

Interviewing as a Method

From February to April 2021, I completed an internship with the International Research Association of Advanced Institutions of Gender Studies, RINGS. I conducted four separate interviews with feminist scholars from across the world to discuss the topic of decolonisation and how they had experienced doing decolonial work at the university. A consent form was

¹⁷ For example, feminist knowledge by white women has been critiqued by Black feminists (hooks 1982; Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith 1982; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981) for universalising women's experiences and marginalising Black women.

signed by each participant; they agreed to having the interview recorded, to myself taking notes, to confidentiality and anonymity, and to using the qualitative data gathered for my internship and thesis research (see Appendix I). Each scholar had a different area of expertise, and hence why I have selected four main axes for analysis: race, gender, class and (dis)ability. This inevitably limits the scope of my research, however my choice to limit participants was made for practical reasons and because I wanted to focus on speaking with individuals sharing lived experiences. For the purpose of this project, a small data set was more meaningful than a large-scale data set. However, this means that this thesis is not conclusive in its analysis of social injustice in the university space, but it is a contribution to the growing body of literature on the university and decolonisation.

The interviews were informal, held online due to the widespread locations of the participants and due to coronavirus. The participants showed varying concerns over privacy and so, to ensure confidentiality, I will not disclose specific locations but use broad terms to illustrate the diversity in geo-political location: two scholars are from Africa, one scholar is from Asia and one scholar is from Europe.¹⁸ All of the participant's names used in my analysis are pseudonyms, I assigned two and two were selected by the interviewees. Finally, I approached the participants because of their position as gender studies or feminist scholars in their field. All were in favour of decolonising the institution and displayed awareness of their own situatedness and the limitations of their actions.

Each interview was approximately forty-five minutes and I prepared a semi-structured interview with a set of leading questions (see Appendix II). I began with specific questions, asking the participants to share their context, their position within the institution and their experiences with decolonial work. I moved onto more open-ended questions about what it means to decolonise and related some of the research that the scholars had published to decolonisation. The questions were kept open to allow for easy flowing conversation and for the participants to contextualise the term 'decolonise'. I had seen from academic readings (Andrews 2018; Mbembe 2017; Quijano 2000; Tuck and Yang 2012; Smith 1999) that decolonise changed its meaning in context and, as the participants were from different geopolitical locations, I wanted to see how each would understand 'decolonise the university'.

¹⁸ Later in this thesis, more details are revealed about the context of (some) participants in order to situate the data, but this should not be equivocated with where they are originally from.

It was initially accidental that I used the term ‘decolonise’ broadly that meant participants contextualised it themselves, and after seeing how varied the first two responses were, my lack of specificity in using the term ‘decolonise’ became a purposeful action. This deliberate decision yielded rich answers in understanding what decolonial means. Participants’ responses were so variegated that I chose to write my internship research on what it means to do international decolonial work if decolonial work is so locally contextualised (see Appendix III). I have utilised the remainder of the qualitative data, principally how intersectional decolonial work is, for analysis in this thesis.

Interviewing as a method is useful to feminist/decolonial research because it provides direct access to lived experiences. The one-to-one interviews created an intimate space where interviewees shared their critiques of the university and how they had, or had not, experienced decolonial work. Jean Duncombe and Julie Jessop (2002) discuss the interview method as sometimes being like ‘faking friendship’ and how interview participants are persuaded to share experiences with the interviewer who ‘does rapport’ so that participants disclose certain information. I attempted to avoid this ‘ethical problem with rapport’ through the nature of the interview questions as they did not include personal questions. My genuine interest in the different lived experiences of the participants in doing decolonial work meant that I spent a lot of the interview actively listening. It was implicitly understood from the very initial stages of asking for interviews that the scholars I spoke with would be in favour of making the university a more inclusive space and this inherently fostered rapport between us because of a mutual interest. Duncombe and Jessop show that with a shared interest, rapport between participants and interviewees often became more fruitful, with participants disclosing more because of a foundation of trust. My research concurs with their findings, as the mutual recognition the participants and I had, built rapport which led to the participants sharing a rich diversity of perspectives.

Whilst I conducted the interviews, I was aware of my position as a student and interviewer. I tried not to lead the interview, but to follow the answers given by the participants to have a fuller understanding of decolonial work at the university and to hear the participants’ many years as a feminist in the neoliberal university. To support this, I read academic work by the participants prior to the interview so that I had a good understanding of what research areas they were involved in. This also helped me with preparing my questions as I could focus on what the interviewee was most knowledgeable about and what would be most insightful for

me. After I conducted each interview, I reviewed the questions I asked and noted that the richest answers came from delving deeper into the research participants had produced themselves, as opposed to citing other scholars. Therefore, I utilised questions around specific elements in decolonial theory less, in favour of specific questions on the participants area of expertise. For example, in Appendix II, questions seven to nine on specific theory sometimes were abandoned and replaced with a more in-depth, spontaneous series of questions that were a response to detailed answers on the participants field of expertise.

Sharlene Hesse-Biber (2006) says that interviewing becomes feminist when it attempts to gain an understanding of oppressed groups, promotes social justice and change, takes into consideration power relations between interviewer and interviewee, and the researcher practices reflexivity (Hesse-Biber 2006; 6). My method is feminist, then, because of the types of questions I asked which were: to gain an understanding of the lives of marginalised groups at the university; to promote social justice and change through decolonial work; to do self-reflexive research; to understand the power dynamics between myself and the interviewees; and, to follow the participants' responses to questions by actively listening and allowing participants to guide the conversation. The method of interviewing is important for my research, and for all decolonial research, because it allows access to the perspectives of those who may otherwise be hidden by the neoliberal agenda. Hesse-Biber states that the aim of feminist interviewers is to seek an understanding of the lived experiences of the individuals, she says 'we are interested in getting at the "subjective" understanding an individual brings to a given situation or set of circumstances' (ibid.; 7). The subjective understandings of my interviewees have been invaluable into understanding the nuances, tensions and similarities in doing decolonial work across the globe. Interviewing as a method has provided me with extremely rich data from the perspective of experienced scholars on the topic of decoloniality, and, in fact, wielded so much data that I produced an internship research report and a thesis on such.

Chapter 3: Teaching and Knowledge Production

This is going to challenge your power, it's going to challenge the practices that you're used to, it's going to challenge masculinity, it's going to challenge all of that.

- Nora, interview participant

This chapter focuses on four areas of doing decolonial work in teaching and knowledge production: the curriculum, epistemologies, methodologies and the languages that we use. Decolonising academia means challenging hegemonic norms and understanding the plethora of lived experiences through an intersectional lens (Mirza 2014). First, I focus on curriculum change that emphasises a move away from Eurocentric curricula to include the Other and to question the power relations that exist in the university by asking who is/is not visible in our syllabi. Second, I argue that to rethink our epistemologies calls for a fundamental challenge to the ways that we produce knowledge by enacting 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo 2009). Third, I turn to an analysis in rethinking our methodologies as I show that self-reflexivity is crucial to understand how inequalities are reproduced at the university. Last, with a focus on language, I argue that monolingualism in academia is a colonial move (Mbembe 2016) and that local languages, particularly in polyglot nations, need to be given the same academic merit that dominant languages are given.

Curriculum Change

Decolonial work must be concerned with changing the curricula to increase the representation of marginalised communities and, although individual university courses undergo systematic curricula review, we need to ask questions about in/exclusions at the institution. To differing degrees, the interviewees addressed how we might change curricula from being Eurocentric and white-washed to more inclusive of (though not limited to) gender issues, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) experiences and to avert the focus on being 'able'. In order to understand how the university is reproducing exclusion, we might ask: What knowledge is being shared? Whose knowledge is it? Who/what is being privileged? Whose

interests dominate?¹⁹ The curriculum change must include those it seeks to provide greater representation of and the Other needs to be directly involved in curriculum change. Based upon the findings of my fieldwork, I argue that as individuals that are sensitive to social inequalities, women, BIPOC and people with disabilities can provide a unique perspective on curriculum change. However, we cannot simply ‘add the marginalised and stir’²⁰ but understand that the Other holds epistemic privilege that allows for a greater critical awareness of how oppression.²¹ Uma Narayan (1989) says that ‘our [the marginalised] commitment to the contextual nature of knowledge’ does in fact ‘permit us to argue that it is *easier* and *more likely* for the oppressed to have critical insights into the conditions of their own oppression than it is for those who live outside these structures’ (Narayan 1989; 337). It is not that we cannot know the experiences of the Other, but that the epistemic privilege of oppressed groups is worthy of attention so that our position, as the marginalised, is not romanticised but given the platform to be heard.

Quijano (2000) critiques the Eurocentric view of history and says that ‘the Eurocentric perspective of knowledge operates as a mirror that distorts what it reflects’ (Quijano 2000; 556). Interview participant, Nora, shared that an uncritiqued, white-washed, Eurocentric curriculum in South Africa was one of the student demands in 2015 during #RhodesMustFall protests. Throughout her career, she said there was an expectation for her to conform to a ‘very Western cultural model’ that was ‘the gold standard’, however there have been shifts in recent years. Similarly, interview participant Mali argued that higher education institutions in India are on tenuous ground doing decolonial work because, whilst there has been a desire to separate from a ‘Western cultural model’, there is a danger that we are ‘moving towards...more and more colonisation by the American system’. The move toward a U.S. curriculum is an imperialist move that reshapes colonial relations in a contemporary framework and maintains the colonial logic that West is best. We must critique our curricula to include different lived

¹⁹ ‘Curriculum Change Framework’. 2018. Curriculum Change Working Group at the University of Cape Town. Last accessed: 27th May 2021. <https://www.news.uct.ac.za/images/userfiles/downloads/reports/ccwg/UCT-Curriculum-Change-Framework.pdf>

²⁰ Nel Noddings (2001) critiques ‘add *women* and stir’ and argues that simply adding representations of women into scholarly work is ‘inadequate’. I argue similarly that only adding representations of the marginalised Other without addressing structural exclusions is inadequate.

²¹ We must be aware of not playing ‘oppression olympics’. Ange-Marie Hancock (2011) in her book *Solidarity Politics for Millennials: A Guide to Ending the Oppression Olympics* argues that intersectionality as an analytical tool that must be utilised (by Millennial activists in their fight for freedom) against those that wish to repress increased global social freedom. Oppression Olympics is a regressive notion that places oppression on a scale and in competition, with individuals/groups being regarded as ‘more oppressed’ than another. This formats oppression as measurable and quantifiable; it destroys nuanced experiences and it is not intersectionality. Intersectionality is the understanding that specific identities and experiences interact in a way that makes it impossible to tell them apart. Oppression Olympics does not improve relations and it is not conducive to freedom.

experiences otherwise we are reproducing the ideology that Western ways of knowing are the only experiences worth sharing. We must not remodel epistemic coloniality as Quijano suggests, but change our curricula to include a diversity of lived experiences if we want to transform the university into an institution founded upon inclusion.

The introduction of new modules, workshops and disciplines at the university shows an awareness of social issues that need solving, however, we must understand the limitations of such. In the UK, Kehinde Andrews (2018) argues that the introduction of Black Studies to the curriculum has been a historic move, but does not call it 'decolonial'. He says that Black Studies has been introduced by the neoliberal management of the university that 'simply puts Black faces in white spaces' (Andrews 2018; 139). As an exclusive act, new modules or disciplines do not restructure the university or decolonise it, but they do begin to include communities that have been historically excluded. Interview participant, Joanne, shared that a compulsory gender module had been incorporated into the curriculum for all first-year students to combat inconsistencies in students' understanding of what constitutes gender-based violence at her institution. Joanne said that gender is a 'very relative concept' because of the different cultural backgrounds of her students. Cultural relativism has been the driving force behind the introduction of a compulsory gender module for Joanne, but it is notable because of the institution's concrete commitment to tackling and naming oppression. Joanne's university is taking seriously the demands for equality, publicly displaying its allyship in combating social injustices, and making actual changes to the curriculum. Therefore, to add new disciplines or workshops and to change the curriculum to be more inclusive is not a negative move, but Andrews' work highlights the need to understand curriculum change as decolonial work within a wider framework, as work that must be done in relation to the domains that follow in this thesis, not as a standalone contribution.

Rethinking Epistemology

There is not 'one' epistemology that we need to rethink, but the process in which epistemologies are selected and used at the university that needs to be rethought. Vandana Shiva (2003) argues that coloniality is about 'monocultures of the mind' and how Western imperial epistemologies 'are totalitarian and epistemically non-democratic [in] implementation' (cf. Mignolo 2009; 176). Furthermore, she says that monocultures are not

sustainable and that at some point ‘they will crack’ because they are ‘designed to fail’.²² To allow hegemonic epistemologies to continue dominating academia is enacting monocultures of the mind because they do not make difference visible. The coloniser/dominant has a single epistemology, so to move beyond this, we must have a multitude; we must have ‘*polycultures of the mind*’. To achieve diversity, Mignolo (2009) says that we must enact ‘epistemic disobedience’ to delink from ‘eurocentric epistemology’ which ‘succeed[ed] in creating the idea of universal knowledge as if the knowing subjects were also universal’ (Mignolo 2009; 160) and not locally situated. The task in doing decolonial work is to expand our epistemologies by giving merit to alternative ways of knowing, then we can transform the university as a space that is inclusive of communities that have been marginalised by coloniality.

To evidence the necessity of incorporating different epistemologies in the university to ensure students feel that they belong, interviewee Alba stated that epistemologies stemming from postcolonial/decolonial theory and gender studies had provided a way for her to access the university. Without these epistemological standpoints, she said she was not able to understand herself as a marginalised subject and hence felt that she did not belong at the university. By providing students with epistemologies from diverse politics of location, greater representation is given to knowledge produced differently. Students are able to ‘see themselves’ in academia and not alienated by it. A sense of belonging is fostered, as with the case of Alba, who felt for many years that she did not belong in the university because she was ‘labelled as foreign and as not belonging’. To promote, nurture, encourage a sense of belonging is to empower and inspire students, it is, after all, the freedom to think differently purported by different epistemologies that ensured Alba’s commitment to and retention within the university. It was the access she had to difference, to ‘epistemic disobedience’ (Mignolo 2009), that sustained her interest in academia. Rethinking our epistemologies is fundamental to doing decolonial work as it provides the Other with representation, thus fostering a sense of belonging which, in turn, increases knowledge production and frames the university as an inclusive institution.

Rethinking Methodology

²² An interview with Vandana Shiva by David Barsamian. 2003. ‘Monocultures of the mind’. India Together. Last accessed: 31st May 2021. <http://indiatogether.org/vandana-interviews>

Utilising self-reflexivity in our methodologies requires a broad, nuanced awareness of one's own subjectiveness. Donna Haraway (1988) and Sandra Harding (1991) posit that by addressing our situatedness within the world, we are able to produce knowledge with greater objectivity than if we were to ignore what made us human. All interviewees stated that rethinking methodology meant a stark awareness of our situatedness through self-reflexivity. Joanne said that 'you cannot move from yourself, except to actually disclose your biases and prejudices so that your reader knows your standpoint'. Alba, too, characterised the process of self-reflexivity as something she took seriously, but that it caused her to produce knowledge slowly, 'because you are thinking all the time'. Haraway argues that to ignore our situatedness and claim objectivity is to claim that we have an 'infinite vision' of the world which is 'an illusion, a god trick' (Haraway 1988; 582). It is of paramount importance to review our methodologies to remain aware of our context, to critique our positionality, so that we are in a permanent state of self-reflexivity. This is doing decolonial work, it will enable us to understand how we can be accountable for our actions.

Essential to rethinking methodology also lies in doing things differently, which is, according to Nora, 'the biggest struggle'. Audre Lorde (1979) argued that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' and that 'difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic' (Lorde 1979; 111). To begin thinking differently, we must rethink our methodologies to consider other ways of being and doing. Nora said that change cannot come from the 'same committee that created the program' and that we cannot do decolonial work within a colonial framework. When discussing the same topic with Alba, she said that, because of the university's ties to coloniality, 'I think it cannot be decolonised'. Despite the heavy weight of coloniality and its potential impossibility, Nora saw through this impasse to argue that 'decolonising the university as a whole, the whole system, and how it operates is necessary' and stated 'I don't think that it can't be changed'. Citing apartheid as a repressive system that has been abolished (although, Nora argued, very much still existing in practice), she said that by transforming and restructuring our methodologies, decolonisation was possible. We need to utilise self-reflexive methods and we need the creativity that Lorde speaks of. Creative thinking will come from listening to different perspectives, it will not be achieved by listening to those in current positions of power, for if decolonial work is left to hegemonic groups, the same structure will be built. An openness to learning from those that have been historically excluded from positions

will lead to creative and innovative ways of doing and with this, we may be able to transform existing structural inequalities to produce something different, something decolonised.

Language

Mbembe (2016) asserts ‘colonialism rhymes with monolingualism’ (Mbembe 2016; 36). He argues that African universities should have African languages at the heart of their teaching and learning thus making them multilingual institutions. His assessment has illuminated the issue of language for interviewees situated in polyglot nations, where the question is not how to choose which language to use, but how to incorporate languages in education so that they are valued equally. Nora described how local languages were disregarded as unsuitable for education and how English has ‘come through as dominant through a particular system’. By invalidating local languages, social inequalities are perpetuated as students cannot fully access education. It is not surprising, then, that students with lower-level English proficiency may fall behind because they have not had the same English-language opportunities as someone whose native language is English. Nora said that ‘for me, that’s the colonial system. That’s what it does, it takes one language, and it almost oppresses the other’. This shows how important it is that we incorporate other languages and ensure structural support for those with a different native tongue. We must transform blaming students into assisting students, yet refrain from assuming a paternalistic role, so that students from marginalised language backgrounds are supported to obtain equal opportunities in (higher) education institutions.²³

The interviewees’ understanding of how local languages are repressed in favour of a dominant language highlights the coloniality of language and ‘linguicide’ (Hall and Tandon 2017). Hall and Tandon (2017) argue that the oppression of languages is deeply intertwined with the oppression of culture, known as cultural genocide, that continues to take place today (ibid.; 11-12). They state that ‘the continued linguicide of Indigenous languages in North America and

²³ In a Western European context, I am specifically considering the position of asylum seekers and students from ex-colonies within the education system, sometimes branded as ‘too lazy to learn’. We must consider present-day imperialism/neocolonialism and the reasons behind migration to European nations. It may have been caused by conflict/invasion inflicted or perpetuated by imperial nations, work difficulties/personal financial issues caused by the ex-colonies national economic challenges where, for example in India and Jamaica, colonisers have been responsible for draining the colonised of natural resources and thus of their own (future) profits. I am reminded of Sri-Lankan novelist, Ambalavaner Sivananda’s infamous phrase: ‘We are here because you were there’, and the wide-reaching colonial (read: imperialist) matrix of power which continues to marginalise those who have been historically oppressed by colonialism. We cannot blame students from different backgrounds, but show greater awareness of their situatedness and the power relations that have caused their ‘being here’.

throughout the world today is evidence that the patterns established through conquest in the sixteenth century is still deeply entrenched in our own minds, and most certainly in our higher education institutions' (ibid.; 12). To do decolonial work, we must acknowledge the languages that we are excluding as it ignores the culture and lived experiences of those who speak the languages.²⁴ Mali shared that in India, there has been a 'revivalist' tendency that rejects different pasts and languages, instead inclined toward the promotion of Sanskrit over other modern Indian languages. Local languages have thus been rejected in favour of a uniform national language imposed by hegemonic classes. This repression re-enacts colonial relations and extends oppressive power structures that continue to marginalise the Other. We do not necessarily have to incorporate different languages into the university but we need to understand how our choice to exclude languages may continue to exclude those in already marginalised positions and, therefore, prevent our objective of doing decolonial work.

Conclusion: Decolonising Teaching and Knowledge Production

Decolonising our teaching and knowledge production begins by asking questions. The questions we must ask about inclusion/exclusion and a critique of our positionality will highlight the limitations and challenges of our university as an institution that belongs to everyone. Greater representation of marginalised communities is fulfilled through making curriculum changes, it marks a commitment to diversifying curricula and a move away from Eurocentrism. Rethinking our epistemologies and methodologies means a thorough engagement with how knowledge is produced at the academy, which knowledges are being taught and a need to utilise self-reflexive methods. Our awareness of the languages that are being used means placing academic merit on different languages spoken, for to ignore local languages is cultural genocide and imitates oppressive colonial relations (Hall and Tandon 2017). To decolonise our university, we must provide greater representation to those who have been historically excluded because an increase in representation generates a commitment to inclusivity that will provide heightened access to the university for all prospective and current students.

²⁴ If linguistic is entwined with cultural oppression (cultural genocide), then both are inherently connected to epistemicide because each relates to how one produces and shares knowledge. Ramón Grosfogel (2013) argues that epistemicide is the death of local ways of knowing by the coloniser in which 'Euro-centric structures of knowledge became "common-sensical"' (Grosfogel 2013; 87). So, if we are to commit linguistic, we are subsequently committing cultural genocide and epistemicide, thus reproducing hegemonic methodologies that perpetuate exclusion at the university and the Eurocentric canon and coloniality prevails.

Chapter 4: Facilitating Access

You want to decolonise the university? Give money, give money to those who want to study so they can enter and stay in the university.

- Alba, interview participant

Facilitating access to the university constructs it as an institution that does not exclude students from marginalised communities but as a space in which they are welcomed. It is about bringing the ‘outsider’ in, ensuring their retention within and reducing the stereotype of the ‘space invader’ (Puwar 2004). First, I explore the ways that BIPOC students have been marginalised by the university environment through the placement of colonial statues that glorify colonialism. Second, I outline the need to understand how students with disabilities have been marginalised by the university environment. The third section is focused on economic/financial access where I provide an analysis of neoliberal management to argue that decolonial work is a stark break from the market agenda. I analyse how issues over university fees and affordability complicate the intersections of gender and class and show how one axis may invisibilise another. Last, the section on community involvement analyses the ways that the community is brought into research and the need to question what our research *really* does.

The University Environment

The presence of statues that memorialise colonial legacy alienate the historically oppressed from the university space. In 2015, at the University of Cape Town, #RhodesMustFall protests erupted that demanded the removal of colonial imperialists’ statue, Cecil Rhodes.²⁵ It sparked a wave of student protests across the world against colonial statues and symbols at the university.²⁶ Mbembe (2016) explains that the retention of colonial figures represent ‘people who have tormented and violated all that which the name “Black” stands for’ (Mbembe 2016; 30). Nora explained that the #RhodesMustFall protest was ‘really the turning point for thinking

²⁵ BBC News. 2015. ‘Rhodes statue removed in Cape Town as crowd celebrates’. Last accessed: 12th May 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32236922>

²⁶ Aamna Mohdin, Richard Adams and Ben Quinn. 2020. The Guardian. ‘Oxford college backs removal of Cecil Rhodes statue’. Last accessed: 12th May 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jun/17/end-of-the-rhodes-cecil-oxford-college-ditches-controversial-statue> ; and Anemona Hartocollis. 2016. NY Times. ‘Harvard Law to Abandon Crest Linked to Slavery’. Last accessed: 12th May 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/05/us/harvard-law-to-abandon-crest-linked-to-slavery.html>

about what the deep-rooted problems were' at her institution. The continued presence of statues and building names that uphold coloniality should not be contested when our aim is to be more inclusive. That is not to say that we implement statues from marginalised communities as replacements, but that we are aware of the cultural symbols that we display for they carry social meanings and may romanticise coloniality. Rosemarie Buikema (2018) shows us that 'every representation acts to normalise some worlds while excluding others' (Buikema 2018; 89). Therefore, some representations at the university perpetuate marginalisation by continuing colonial rhetoric by alienating and excluding the Other. The university must critique and remove its statues because they represent *something*. The removal of statues is a statement that the university does not stand for discrimination but that it is at the forefront of social justice and taking seriously its role in decolonial work.

Although these specific protests have subsided, it is important to relate decolonial work to the access that historically excluded students have to the institution today in order to situate decolonial work. Nirmal Puwar (2004) argues that certain bodies are viewed as 'space invaders' in certain spaces and to dismantle this discourse 'in order to rise', the dominant group need to support the 'space invader' (Puwar 2004; 121). She says that for women and racialised minorities who 'don't fit the traditional somatic norm in the higher echelons of the public realm...most especially need advocates' (ibid.). Equal access to the university for marginalised bodies will not be achieved through the efforts of the marginalised alone, access is a collective struggle in which the hegemonic group must participate too. In her interview, Alba stated that decolonial work 'will question his position' and that the privileged group must understand that they are 'gaining from it'.²⁷ Decolonial work must include the privileged and I appeal to the university to commit to allyship and camaraderie. Bell hooks (1984) explains this notion of camaraderie in her chapter 'Men: Comrades in Struggle', where I interchange 'men' with 'the university' for the decolonial objective. This has the effect of illustrating the crucial role that privileged groups must play in the removal of discriminatory practices. She says:

Separatist ideology encourages us to believe that women [the marginalised] alone can make feminist [decolonial] revolution-we cannot. Since men are [the university is] the primary agents maintaining and supporting sexism [exclusionary practices] and sexist [social] oppression, they can only be successfully eradicated if men are [the university

²⁷ See also the opening quote in chapter three from Nora, 'doing' decolonial work is about challenging power and masculinity.

is] compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their consciousness and the consciousness of society as a whole. (hooks 1984: 81).

Crucial to decolonial work is the endorsement of inclusionary practices from the very heart of the university institution, the privileged must rally with marginalised communities to implement transformation. As hooks shows us, oppression is not exclusively an issue of the oppressed, it is an issue for us all, regardless of our positionality.

Access and (Dis)ability

We must also be critical in viewing the physical space of the university as navigable by wheelchair or crutch users.²⁸ A study conducted by Iva Strnadová, Vanda Hájková and Lea Květoňová (2015) into how disabled students experienced Czech universities showed that one of the most prominent exclusions for disabled students was the architectural barriers of buildings.²⁹ One student reported the impossibility of transitioning between classes that were in buildings far away from one another saying ‘there is not enough time’ (Strnadová, Hájková and Květoňová 2015; 1085). In her interview, Nora stated that she had worked with a disabled scholar, but this scholar was no longer employed at her institution because ‘it’s not easy for people to keep in a working environment in which most people, especially disabled people, will say is not being sensitive to their needs’. The lack of consideration toward students who are disabled directly concurs with Nora’s statement that the university is not sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities, especially those arising from mental health impairments. So when we speak of physical access to the university, considerations must be made into how students with disabilities navigate the institution and how it caters to their needs. Decolonising the university is about inclusion, it is about transforming the institution so that it considers everyone’s needs, it must support students with their full integration into university life and to prevent continued marginalisation.

Jay Dolmage (2017) analyses how disabled bodies have been stigmatised as ‘abject, invisible, disposable, less than human’ while able-bodiedness is depicted as ‘ideal, normal, and the mean

²⁸ Unfortunately, a broader analysis into how the university has excluded different physical disabilities (for example, how can blind students access online platforms? Or how do deaf students access spoken word lectures?) falls outside the scope of my thesis.

²⁹ This included ramps being located far away from where students needed to be (ramps should be next to all sets of stairs, not only at the main entrance), accessibility of toilets (disabled toilets should be on every floor), as well as where classes physically took place.

or default' (Dolmage 2017; 7). He says that often disabled people have not been included in academia because they have been the subjects of research by higher education instead. Nora said that 'when we talk about decolonising, we often think race and gender, and disability is silenced' because the university 'is a colonial space' that is very much focused on ableism. We need to analyse the ways that the university has perpetuated disability discrimination and how it has historically only accommodated those who are 'culturally' able.³⁰ Doing decolonial work must deconstruct the barriers that prevent disabled students from being fully included in academia and to un-stigmatise the disabled body. As Nora explained, 'the number of students with disabilities in higher education is a very, very small number' and hence it is of paramount importance that issues around disability inclusion are addressed in order to prevent disability discrimination from being reproduced. We *cannot* do decolonial work unless we address the issues around disability exclusion.

Alison Kafer (2013) argues that a focus on physical disabilities has been at the detriment of *invisible* disabilities (Kafer 2013; 16). With a greater emphasis on visible markers of identity (visible disabilities, race, gender), we are in danger of ignoring *invisible* markers of identity that, arguably, may be even 'more' marginalised (invisible disabilities, class). Nora shared some of the difficulties she had experienced surrounding mental health within higher education institutions that does not provide enough systemic support. She stated that people with invisible disabilities would be present within the university but 'often not disclosing'. The reasons behind individuals choosing not to disclose their disability is, Anna Mollow (2006) argues, because 'mental illness means risking social stigmatization' (Mollow 2006; 286). To divulge disability means that an individual's lived experience may be affected in such a way that stigmatisation prevents inclusion into the university.³¹ A step toward combating social stigmatisation around disability and averting the reproduction of social injustices is to understand how the core culture of our institution can support inclusion, we need to ask how disability can be infused into the very structures of our institution. By taking a disability inclusion perspective, Robert McRuer (2002) argues, we 'resist delimiting the kinds of bodies

³⁰ It is relevant to mention here that by 'culturally', I am relating my analysis to scholarly work produced in critical disability studies that 'adopts a position of cultural relativism whilst seeking to say some things about the global nature of disability' (Goodley et al. 2019; 977). (Dis)ability is not fixed, the boundaries in defining disability are fluid and change over time and place, they are dependent upon culture. Therefore, I utilise 'culturally' to convey that being able-bodied is also culturally constructed and may vary in how being (dis)abled is understood.

³¹ The study by Strnadová, Hájková and Květoňová (2015) aforementioned outlines the reluctance of staff to provide support to disabled students and the negative treatment of disabled students by their peers. This evidences the social stigmatisation of disability and the need to address disability as a social, rather than medical, issue.

and abilities that are acceptable or will bring about change (McRuer 2002; 97). In viewing our institution through a (dis)ability lens, we are considering an elsewhere that is valuable and integral into fulfilling our aim of having an institution that is designed to include, not exclude.

Economic/Financial Access

There is a body of work that shows how universities have been co-opted by the neoliberal market and increased fees to the detriment of the free production of ideas and at the expense of increased social equality (Andrews 2018; Bhambra, Nişancıoğlu and Gebriel 2020; Choury and Vally 2020; Dolmage 2017; Holmwood 2018; Newfield 2016). Bhambra, Nişancıoğlu and Gebriel (2020) argue that neoliberal reforms have ‘hollowed out’ institutions in the UK and ‘brought into sharp relief institutional injustices and inequalities oriented around race’ (Bhambra, Nişancıoğlu and Gebriel 2020; 2). John Holmwood (2018) says that the neoliberal university sells higher education as an ‘investment in human capital with an eye to [student] returns in the labour market’ which destroys the university as a space for academic freedom and knowledge production (Holmwood 2018; 37). Social inequalities are reproduced at the neoliberal institution, and Dolmage (2018) shows that the neoliberal university is a way for the ‘rich [to]...get richer’. He describes the proposed inclusion of disabled people into academia as a ‘neoliberal value’ that further stigmatises disability (Dolmage 2018; 28). Interviewee Mali said that decolonising the university means to free it from the state and from private corporations. The involvement of the state and private corporations prevents the university from existing as a place of academic freedom, and as a result, it becomes ‘hijacked away from its original purpose’. Mali stated the neoliberal management of the university is turning education into the mean and not the end in itself, which is highly problematic because it means the ‘production of a certain kind of citizen, already defined’. This citizen is gendered, racialised and has a certain class orientation, thus reproducing the ‘ideal’ citizen that reflects the dominant group (male, able-bodied, white, middle-class). In other words, the university as a functionary of the neoliberal market harms academic freedom and the production of free ideas. It instead reproduces inequalities by implicitly creating a uniform, ‘ideal’ citizen based on the privileged. This very notion of uniformity is in entire opposition to the decolonial objective, therefore, decolonial work needs to be about challenging the neoliberal management of the university.

The privatisation of universities and their neoliberal management makes the university space even more inaccessible to those from lower-class backgrounds through high fees (Gabriel and Vijayan 2017). During the interview, Alba said that when she was a student, she had struggled to stay in academia because she had to work a full-time job in order to study, ‘I was working, I was not able to read of course, and so I was not able to participate in the classes as all the other students could, because I was there, tired, after working in the night. I didn’t have time to read my texts’. Alba’s experience exemplifies the reproduction of inequalities at the university and the lack of accountability that the institution took for financial needs of students. As with invisible disabilities, students’ financial needs are not visible so we must address how the university is responsible for replicating social inequalities. To talk of decolonising and making the university a space for us all must involve money and reduced fees. The call to decolonise the university is, then, a call to enact social justice and end the reproduction of inequalities by eradicating class differences and making higher education accessible to all.³²

As well as financial access to the university in terms of fees, we must consider the economic concerns over accommodation and internet access. COVID-19 has heightened class issues over access to the university as socially distanced online home-learning replaced the classroom. As a recent phenomenon, scholarly work is sparse on the effects of COVID-19 and university students, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, but Joanne’s recent experience with distanced learning has illuminated student financial concerns. She said that a lot of her students are from remote, rural areas and do not have access to proper reception and signal. A study conducted by Olasile Adedoyin and Emrah Soykan (2020) shows that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to be able to afford a stable broadband connection and ‘are most vulnerable to fall behind or encounter additional challenges to meet up with others in online learning’ (Adedoyin and Soykan 2020; 4). The pandemic has caused an increase in social inequalities as those without the internet access needed to study have not been able to access the materials and resources necessary. The marginalised have been forcibly placed at a disadvantage (again) and it is our role, through decolonial work, to reduce and eradicate this injustice.

³² It is possible to decolonise the institution by reducing fees. I lay credit to Utrecht University for their decision to reduce fees for the following academic year, 2021-2022. I hope this reduction may be extended and become a permanent measure. Last accessed 13th May 2021. <https://www.uu.nl/masters/en/general-information/international-students/financial-matters/tuition-fees>.

The intersections of gender and class are closely bound and become especially apparent when analysing the issues that Joanne shared over the gendered consequences of solutions to class issues. Joanne commented on concerns about accommodation relating to the remote villages that her students were from, to say that internet access, access to resources and costly travel expenses were often solved by living on campus. Although seeming to solve issues around finances, the allocation of university halls is an issue that must not invisibilise the gendered consequences of such solutions. In her interview, Joanne said that ‘our institution fails dismally, when it comes to safety on campus, particularly girls’. If, as some scholars argue (Appleton 2019; Tuck & Yang 2012), decolonisation is exclusively about the repatriation of land and resources to indigenous peoples, we must also consider the import of patriarchal power relations as a colonial imposition because of the harm hegemonic, Western notions of gender continue to have on women students. Maria Lugones (2008) demonstrates that pre-colonial societies did not have fixed, binary definitions of gender but that the man/woman dichotomy was enforced upon native and indigenous communities by colonisers. She says that ‘as Eurocentred, global capitalism was constituted through colonization, gender differentials were introduced where there were none’ (ibid.; 21). Coloniality and hegemony have a direct impact on women because of their position as non-dominant in the man/woman binary. Through a decolonial and intersectional lens, it is possible to see how women and lower-class students are subject to discrimination and vulnerability at the university. Students with financial difficulties opt to live on campus, but their visible identity marker in being a woman subjects them to further vulnerability and violence. The intersections of gender and class are deeply entrenched and, in doing decolonial work, we must understand the impact behind attempting to solve either issue exclusively. Decolonial work is about the inclusion of all students from marginalised positions and an awareness of how embedded systems of oppression are within one another.

Community Involvement

The university is a part of society and linking the community to the academy, bringing the community ‘in’, is a powerful tool for social justice. Cann and DeMeulenaere (2020) argue that community work and achieving social justice has been the reason that they are in academia. Academia has given them the autonomy, space and time to reflect upon activist work, to write about it, and to engage with the communities that they care about (Cann and DeMeulenaere

2020; 9-12). University research on human beings, the humanities, does by definition involve humans. Nora said that there was a tendency in medical models of disability and in positivist approaches to research to ignore identity categories that construct a research participants' lived experience. She said that 'the process is assumed to be apolitical', no consideration was made over 'how our own biases might limit us' and factors that influence a person's life were ignored in favour of 'objectivity'. Research conducted in the community, in people's lives, needs to take into consideration the external/social influences of a person's lived experiences if we are to take research seriously. Harding (1991) argue that we can only achieve 'strong objectivity' by understanding the location that we are speaking from. A researcher can never be free from their lived experiences and because of this, research can never claim true objectivity. Being self-reflexive in our research is crucial to understand the diversity of lived experiences and, by ignoring and omitting self-reflexivity, we cannot understand how our privilege may affect the community and those we 'study'. As academics that enter communities to conduct research, we need to be aware of the position of privilege that we are speaking from so that we do not 'publish and prosper' without any real engagement (Cann and DeMeulenaere 2020; 10). Smith (1999) argues that research is not innocent, it is 'an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions' (Smith 1999; 5). If we are to bring the community into our research, we need to take a full stance on inclusion by understanding our own biases. The challenge in decolonial work is to always connect our research to the community in order to bring about social inclusion.

Conclusion: Accessing the University

Physical access to the university in terms of how we access and identify with space allows us to foster a sense of belonging and attachment. As Sara Ahmed (2017) has shown 'when we are in question, we question' (Ahmed 2017; 133), thus we must listen to the voices of our students that feel marginalised by their environment, whether it is the retention of colonial statues or access as a student with physical disabilities. Decolonial work must challenge how power is used and who it is held by at the university, it demands a direct confrontation with neoliberal management and its agenda. The ways that the community is brought into research is tantamount to having research that 'does something' and does not perpetuate social injustices. Decolonial work is never painless, never without its challenges, it is a process that must be understood as a discomfort and a distinct break from hegemonic norms. Following on, I explore the nuances behind ethics and care at the university and the stir of emotions that is caused by

the difficulties and necessity in doing decolonial work, and how we need to further listen to the voices of students.

Chapter 5: Ethics and Care

People get away with lots, perpetrators get away with lots, and victims are left to deal with their own grievances and to deal with their own trauma.

- Joanne, interview participant

Ethical care relations between the university and students mean a profound restructuring of the university and how it functions. I first analyse the emotional labour involved in resisting discrimination and doing decolonial work. Sara Ahmed (2017) shows us that our emotions are what drive us to challenge social injustice, but we are often met with distrust and intolerance: ‘when you expose a problem, you pose a problem’ (Ahmed 2017; 37). Second, I explore the issues that interviewees shared on policies and procedures at the university that fail to protect its students and, to situate my argument, I provide a critical analysis of Utrecht University’s code of conduct to argue that imprecise and distanced language alienates students and illustrates the hierarchical binary within the institution that reproduces social inequalities. Last, I address the importance of the student voice in decolonial work and how students have been at the forefront of socio-political activism across the world and that it is our ‘unruliness’ (Vijayan 2020) that means we provide a path to think differently.

Emotional Labour

The representation of oppressed bodies within the institution should not be understood as an exclusively positive move and we need to consider the emotional toll behind those who have been historically marginalised by an oppressive system. Patricia Hill-Collins (1986) states that Black women in academia are the ‘outsider within’ because they are able to understand discrimination and omissions within research in more nuance as individuals that have experienced layers of discrimination. She says that ‘insiders’ are in ‘no position to notice the specific anomalies apparent to Afro-American women because these same sociological insiders produced them’ (Hill-Collins 1986; 29). The ‘outsider within’ framework shows the deep reproduction of social inequalities at the university. Hill-Collins’ analysis is useful because it illuminates the need to address racialised relations at the institution. Nora shared an instance that exemplifies the emotional toll of addressing coloniality as an outsider within, she said that in the wake of #RhodesMustFall protests, the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the

University of Cape Town, Professor Bongani Mayosi committed suicide.³³ She said Prof. Mayosi was ‘caught in a very, very difficult position as a black leader who had to address deep coloniality’ within a white institution and the aftermath of his death was a ‘very emotionally draining time’.³⁴ We need to understand the pressure of being an outsider within an institution that has systemically excluded and the impact it has on mental health. The official report into Prof. Mayosi’s tenure highlights that the efforts to deal with systemic racism at the academy which did not create ‘meaningful change’.³⁵ The case of Prof. Mayosi highlights the *need* to do decolonial work at the university. It highlights that structural change is necessary to facilitate social justice and inclusion, *we must* decolonise. It will - literally - save lives.

Re-reading the interview transcripts has highlighted my own questions and statements around emotional labour and decolonial work. The overwhelming nature of decolonial work is depicted by Ahmed’s metaphor of carrying heavy things, discriminatory experiences, in a bag, ‘but the bag is your body, so that you feel like you are carrying more and more weight’ (Ahmed 2017; 23). I discussed with Mali how the student has become the ‘ideal citizen’ for the neoliberal market and that this was the destruction of academic freedom, I said, ‘this is an overwhelming thought’. With Alba, we discussed how fulfilling the aims of decolonial work may mean the abolition of the neocolonial state and capitalism before the university can be decolonised, which I said is ‘a never-ending street’ and Alba responded, ‘yes, it is a never-ending street’. The many elements of decolonial work are not simple ‘bolt-ons’ to be attached to the current system, they require a deep transformation of the university at its very core, as well as a serious critique of the neoliberal, capitalist agenda that manages the institution. This transformation will come through sheer determination to achieve a decolonised university founded on notions of inclusion and egalitarianism without sacrificing well-being. We might

³³ Biénne Huisman. 2020. ‘Bongani Mayosi faced animosity from students and colleagues, while UCT failed to support him as his health faltered – report’. Daily Maverick. Last accessed: 14th May 2021. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-06-26-bongani-mayosi-faced-animosity-from-students-and-colleagues-while-uct-failed-to-support-him-as-his-health-faltered-report/>

³⁴ Puwar (2004) uses the term ‘ontological complicity’ to describe how marginalised individuals within the institution must assimilate with dominant ‘normal’ bodies by invisibilising their identity and subsuming an element of the dominant identity. For an outsider to exist within a white institution, they must assume whiteness in order to exist. Puwar says that outsiders must be complicit in identifying with the insider, otherwise they would not be able to exist inside at all (Puwar 2004; 119-140). Her argument highlights the refusal of Prof. Mayosi to conform to whiteness, his refusal to be ontologically complicit, and the emotional consequences of resisting hegemony.

³⁵ University of Cape Town. 2020. ‘Enquiry into the Circumstances Surrounding Professor Bongani Mayosi’s Tenure: Crucible for Senior Black Academic Staff’. 71. Last accessed: 27th May 2021. https://www.news.uct.ac.za/images/userfiles/files/publications/Enquiry_into_the_Circumstances_Surrounding_Professor_Bongani_Mayosi's_Tenure_June2020.pdf

be carrying heavy things in a bag, as Ahmed depicts, but decolonial work is about avoiding the addition of more weight and preventing others from carrying weight at all.

Policies and Procedures

University policies employed to denote inclusion and decolonisation are limited in what they can achieve as they are symbolic and often generate little structural change. Ahmed (2012) analyses the gap between ‘saying and doing’ and how the creation of a well-written policy, for example a race policy, is equated with being ‘good’ at race equality. The existence of such policies creates ‘equality systems’ by which being good at social justice can be measured but these policies ‘conceal the inequalities that make such systems necessary in the first place’ (Ahmed 2012; 100). Joanne said policies designed to promote inclusion are fine in theory, however they often failed to deliver what they promised. She said that gender-based violence policies existed at her institution ‘simply to say that we do have a policy’ and that students do not have access to their rights and that they are violated on a regular basis. Nora’s statement echoes that of Joanne’s, she said that ‘decolonial theory is nice, you can read it, but implementing it is the hard part’. Policies and documents that demonstrate a commitment to social change and justice are thus performative and a weak attempt to change. That is not to say that policies should not exist, but that the extent to which policies are representative of structural, institutional change is severely limited and instead provide a symbolic gesture. Remaining critical of what we are saying and doing, and understanding the limitations of our actions is vital when introducing new policies and procedures at the university so that these documents do not become empty signs, but signify structural change.

An Analysis of Utrecht ‘My’ University’s Code of Conduct

Utrecht University, ‘my’ university, an institution/object that I am associated with, attached to, study at, will graduate from.³⁶ I situate myself within the framework of Utrecht University and it is from this situatedness I critically analyse the code of conduct. As aforementioned, during my studies, a fellow student on the same course was discriminated against on the grounds of

³⁶ Throughout this section, I continue to refer to Utrecht University with first person possessive pronouns to portray the attachment I have to ‘my’ university. By insisting on the entanglement of myself with the university, I do not separate myself from management, teachers, staff, faculty members and other students but bring us together under a collective, heterogenous umbrella to ensure that I am as equally accountable as an ‘insider’ for the analysis that follows, and how we all have a role to play in doing decolonial work.

her ethnicity. It is not my intention to analyse the complaints process, bureaucratic protocol or support policies that UU has in place to protect victims and punish perpetrators, although this is an issue that has been cause for concern in recent months.³⁷ My analysis instead begins from the start: with outlining the expectations of how we are supposed to act at the university and UU's stance against misconduct more broadly. I turn to our university's code of conduct³⁸ as a document that outlines the expectations in behaviour which is self-described as a 'reflection for employees and students of Utrecht University'. Ahmed (2012) argues that documents at the university are not 'simply objects' but that they are the 'means of doing or not doing something' and that to understand 'what documents are doing we need to follow them around' (Ahmed 2012; 85). I have then questioned what this document does and I argue that there is a lack of accountability through no authorship or date. The simple assumption that this was written by 'Utrecht University' poses many questions in itself. Who is 'Utrecht University' (surely this is not fixed)? What life experiences does the author(s) have that equate their understanding to 'everyone else' at the university? Doing decolonial work must be self-reflexive and, to begin, we need to take responsibility for *who* is writing our policies and procedures.

Ahmed argues that policies are 'institutional speech acts' that do something and the use of the third person ('the university' or 'the students') conveys a certain attitude or feeling that represents the institution (Ahmed 2012; 54-55). Through referencing employees and university management in the third person, there is never a collective 'we',³⁹ the university conveys a distance between 'them' and 'us'. Ahmed argues that a lack of clarity in the language used in institutional speech acts 'may reveal the very trouble with the description'. The ambiguity in UU's code of conduct conveys the impression that the university is unable to depict a true,

³⁷ In April 2021, a Change.org petition was created by UU staff, University Council members, students and alumni to address issues with UU's complaint's procedure and guidelines on misconduct. Actiegroep Wanderdrag (Action Group Wanderdrag), a self-appointed task force, wrote an extensive report into the complaint's procedure and reporting at UU with a particular emphasis on addressing sexual misconduct which can be read here: <https://dub.uu.nl/sites/default/files/NOTA%20UR-leden.pdf>. A response to the online petition from UU's Executive Board was published in the independent news site at Utrecht University, DUB, as the rector stated that 'scepticism about UU's approach toward misconduct not justified': <https://www.dub.uu.nl/en/news/rector-skepticism-about-uus-approach-toward-misconduct-not-justified>. Ongoing issues over measures to be adopted at UU and how far-reaching they might be are continuing at the time of writing this thesis.

³⁸ Utrecht University. 'Code of Conduct'. Last accessed 17th May 2021. <https://www.uu.nl/en/organisation/about-us/codes-of-conduct>

³⁹ On the first page, the subheadings 'what do we wish to achieve?' and 'what do we believe in?' do not draw together those employed or studying at the university with those that manage it. These questions are concrete questions posed by the author to themselves that announce the beginning of a topic and a concern of the university, not a direct concern of its staff and students. The achievements and beliefs belong to the university management because there is no staff or student voice present.

detailed reflection of staff and students. Furthermore, the introductory paragraph reads, ‘our staff operate within a clear ethical framework and people know what they can expect in their dealings with our staff’. The separation between ‘our staff’ and the author creates a hierarchical binary and distance between those that manage and those that are managed. Instead, the sentence might read: ‘*we* operate within a clear ethical framework and people know what they can expect in their dealing with *us*’. By changing to first-person plural pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’, the reader understands that management and the employees function collectively. It illustrates that management, or the author of this document at least, is not a bystander to concerns brought to the university by the public, but that they are actively engaged in university life and have a full, complete awareness of what takes place. Even if we did change the language, Ahmed argues, ‘what is achieved by the mobility of these terms remains another question’ (ibid.; 60). Whilst we might adopt more collective language that accounts for all members of the university, it is not to say that this language fosters concrete unity between the management, staff and students. A transformation of the code of conduct that uses more specific language is important to convey a feeling and attitude of collaboration and collective accountability, but we must recognise the limitations of solely transforming a policy or procedure and address the structural change that needs to come with it.

The distance created between the author and staff and students portrays that there is an ‘objective’, ‘neutral’ narrator. The Cambridge dictionary states that to be neutral, one has ‘features or characteristics that are not easily noticed’ and related words are: indistinct, not noticeable, unobserved, invisible.⁴⁰ Puwar (2004) shows us the divide between bodies that are visible/invisible, and how, because whiteness ‘exists as an unmarked normative position’, whiteness and all other invisible identity markers are ‘clearly a place of power’ (Puwar 2004; 58). She says that making whiteness visible is ‘extremely difficult’ (ibid.; 135), and so rather than exposing whiteness, I show that in an attempt to invisibilise oneself and be neutral, the author conveys themselves as unaware of their own biases and, consequently, as unreliable. This conveys a critical disassociation with those that exist in the university community and management. Puwar states that to ignore our identity markers is to replicate the behaviour of those in privileged, dominant positions (ibid.; 153). Instead, we must centralise identity so that we understand the interlocking domains of oppression where, not only we critique from a

⁴⁰ Cambridge Dictionary Online. 2021. ‘Neutral’. Cambridge University Press. Last accessed: 18th May 2021. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/neutral>

marginalised perspective, but we also name and problematise whiteness and masculinity as invisible identity markers (ibid.). Doing decolonial work is about reconstructing the narratives behind what we do at the university through using self-reflexive methods in theory and in practice.

The four core values (inspiration, ambition, independence, commitment) of UU are weighted toward individual competency and less concerned with care and community values such as appreciation, honesty, respect, integrity, pride and safety.⁴¹ Little emphasis placed on care/community values indicates a preference to distance the university from emotionality and sentiment in place of rationality and logic. As decolonial scholars have shown (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Tlostanova & Mignolo 2012; Quijano 2000; Smith 1999), the preference for rationality and logic over emotion grew out of Western European modernity which repelled emotion from the political, public sphere. As women were associated with emotions, their exclusion from sciences and the political arena was justified. This exclusion from scientific studies, argues feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982), meant that psychological studies were missing half of the population. Her research into how women/girls respond to moral dilemmas is useful to illustrate the need to adopt a care perspective into UU's code of conduct. Gilligan argues that women's care focus has given 'a suggestion of alternative perspectives through which moral problems can be interpreted' (cf. Held 1993; 27). To exclude a care perspective from the code of conduct excludes core values that may be held by a number of university staff and students. I am not suggesting that the author may be a man and we need a woman's perspective, this is much too simplistic and fixed binary categories are not useful, but further invisibilise the Other. Instead, the care perspective makes space for a diversity of core values that exist in the university. This is doing decolonial work, it is providing a platform for those from marginalised communities and giving space for difference, rather than conveying that staff and students are detached from care and community.

Virginia Held (1993) argues that ethics of care addresses relationality and relatedness through social bonds with the Other. A care perspective moves away from the individual acting alone and toward caring for the self and the Other as a two that are entwined within one another. Held says that 'persons in caring relations are acting for self – and – other together' (Held 1993; 12).

⁴¹ These examples of care/community values are taken from the code of conduct from four universities in Western Europe: Cardiff University (UK), University of Hull (UK), University of Amsterdam (Netherlands) and Leiden University (Netherlands).

A care perspective is useful to UU's code of conduct as it illuminates gaps within its values on care/community and contributes human connectedness to its core. The care perspective shows ways for us to relate to one another, however it cannot be adopted by management as a quick fix. I have suggested that we need to exist in *caring relations* which cannot be equivocated with *caring about*. Caring about can 'easily become paternalistic or patronising' (ibid.; 18) and therefore, it is not management's duty to care about, but our collective responsibility to care about one another by paying closer attention to each other's needs.

The last section of the code of conduct begins by outlining expectations students, it reads: 'Students at Utrecht University are preparing for careers and responsible positions in society.' We are depicted as a monolithic group devoid of difference, our goals and desires as 'students' are assumed, and it states that *my* aim is not for the pursuit of academic knowledge and freedom, but rather to learn the tools and theories needed to equip myself with the knowledge to function within the neoliberal market. In contrast, another university in the Netherlands, Leiden University states that their first objective is 'freedom of spirit, thought and speech'⁴² which marks the attitude and expectations of its students as one that encourages creativity and the pursuit of academia for knowledge production, not the neoliberal agenda. This is in complete opposition to UU's code of conduct, which makes weak reference to the celebration of academic liberty and by doing so, places itself at the service of neoliberalism and away from egalitarianism and decoloniality. In doing decolonial work, we must combat branding people in homogenous groups and resist the neoliberal agenda. When we resist such a view, students can be seen as political subjects in their own right that enrolled at the university for the sake of academic freedom and knowledge.

Listening to Students⁴³

⁴² Leiden University. 2016. 'Code of Conduct on Integrity'. Last accessed: 21st May 2021. <https://www.staff.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/ul2staff/po/personneelsbeleid-en-gedragscodes/code-of-conduct-for-integrity-2020.pdf>

⁴³ It is important to be explicit about the ways in which I use the term 'students'. Alberto Toscano (2011) says that students are 'apprentice intellectual workers' who are in a temporal location for a short period until they are dispersed into the world. During this brief period, students are 'a compact group which has demonstrated an enormous political impulse in country after country' (Toscano 2011; 83). Students maybe a fluid identity construct, but I utilise 'students' through an intersectional lens that includes diverse identities and how political/social activism at the university may be a concern for any university subject/discipline. The student's identity is then defined as all-encompassing, however, I am aware of the internal tensions and contradictions within student activism and, like Choudry and Vally (2020), thus 'take an unromantic position of social movements and social movement knowledge production' (Choudry and Vally 2020; 5).

Next, I draw upon the strong emphasis that the interviewees placed upon the need to listen to students and their role in decolonial work. It is relevant to note that I am situated directly within the discourse of the university as a student but outside as a gendered, racialised subject. According to Prem Kumar Vijayan (2020), the threats that a collective student body provoke are because students are viewed by the authorities as ‘unruly subjects’. He states that ‘youthfulness’ has often been entangled with discourse around ‘unruliness’, which ‘literally means not to abide by the rules’ (Vijayan 2020; 43). In her interview, Mali said that universities provide the training for ‘young people’s minds to be free’, thus making students ‘actually very powerful agents of change’. It is the university that provides the intellectual tools to students for them to navigate social injustice within and outside of the university space. It is not surprising that, if students are viewed as ‘unruly’, little merit is given to their perspectives and the demands of their protests.⁴⁴ To do decolonial work, we must listen to the voices of all that are within the university space and resist extending prejudice toward students. The student voice is a powerful tool, it is a voice that holds equal relevance to all other voices in society and it needs to be heard.

If the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house (Lorde 1979), we must create new tools to do decolonial work. Decolonial work is about a fundamental restructuring of the institution that eradicates social injustice and reconstructs itself as a site of inclusion. Joanne says, ‘it should include the students’, because, according to Mali, students ‘have powerful imaginations’ who are ‘much less encumbered by prejudice’. Creative, critical thinking is the principal foundation on which decolonial work relies if we want to reconstruct our institution. Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) argue that we must learn to unlearn, we must ‘forget what we have been taught, to break free from the thinking programs imposed on us by education, culture, and social environment’ (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012; 7). Students can facilitate learning to unlearn through their position as ‘unruly’ political subjects that dare to do and think differently. Our role in decolonial work is central to its progression and implementation, the student voice needs to be heard for it provides an alternate perspective on ways in which social injustice might be viewed. A meaningful approach, according to Joanne, is to reverse the teacher-student

⁴⁴ Student protests, particularly over increased university fees, have frequently been met by violent state responses across the globe. See, for example, Jamie Woodcock (2020) on the 2010 student protest movement in the UK where police brutality was utilised to silence protesting students about tripling university fees. Also, see Rosalind Hampton (2020) who outlines police violence against protesting students who were fighting to prevent a proposed 75% fee increase at universities in Canada. Another example is Mahmood Mamdani (2020) who argues that peaceful student protests organised by the Black Consciousness Movement were met with unprecedented police force as they opened fire and hundreds of protesters were killed.

relationship where students are listened to as fully knowing subjects and teachers learn from students. Doing decolonial work means that we give access to students to define their own lived experience without enforcing the teacher as omniscient, and assuming that students are empty knowledge vessels who are ‘unruly’ and need taming.

Student protest movements in the twenty-first century have been entwined with other social movements, forming coalitions against deep social and economic inequalities, political crises and ‘demands for rethinking the framework and purpose of formal education and universal access to free quality education’ (Choudry and Vally 2020; 1).⁴⁵ Protest movements must not be viewed as serving no purpose, but demands must be listened to for they are entrenched within social justice frameworks. Nora says that ‘when students protest, they often get pointed at, but they’re actually raising the issues that are still the inequalities in higher education’. Students hold a unique standpoint for they exist within the institution but also outside of it. If we want to do decolonial work, we must take students seriously because students are key to the process of decolonising and to imagining a different future.

Conclusion: Embracing The ‘Other’ Voice

Ethics and care are crucial to decolonial work because of the deep emotional impact that decolonial work has on the individual. There is no fixed binary between those that oppress and those that are oppressed, there is nuance between lived experience and privilege, life is intersectional. However, the policies and procedures at the university represent *something* as an official norm and we must continue to critique our institutions if we are to understand how our practices perpetuate social exclusion. By taking a care perspective at the university, I have shown that policies and procedures may be transformed to represent an environment that marginalised groups feel they belong and how hierarchical relations may be broken down into care relations to show we are equal human beings. The treatment of one another as equals thus allows us to hear and listen to student voices who occupy a space in society that is especially equipped to challenge hegemony. Adopting a care perspective provides students with a

⁴⁵ Some of these student movements have included protests in the UK (Woodcock 2020), India (Vijayan 2020), Turkey (Özcan 2020), Canada (hampton 2020), Chile (Campos-Martínez and Olavarria 2020), the USA for Palestinian liberation (Abdulhadi and Shehadeh 2020), Palestine (Meari and Duhou 2020), Mexico (Maldonado-Maldonado and Astorga 2020), France (Mazier 2020), South Africa (Mahmood 2020; Gamedze and Naidoo 2020), and more.

platform in which change can be heard, where different ideas come to the fore, and it is precisely from this space of thinking different that decolonial work can be done.

Conclusion

Doing decolonial work is a process that must involve an engagement with all levels of coloniality at an institutional and societal level. I asked how we can decolonise the university as an institution that has been built on exclusion and this thesis has analysed what we can do to begin dismantling historical, hegemonic power structures that continue to marginalise the oppressed. Quijano's (2000) term 'coloniality' depicts the structural oppression of marginalised communities which have remained in place after the end of official colonial administrations across the world. Our task in doing decolonial work is to begin dismantling, questioning and rebuilding the structures of our institution to replace coloniality with something different, something that fosters the inclusion of the marginalised. Chapters three to five have shown some of the ways that decolonial work might be enacted to generate change, and although divided thematically, each chapter should be understood as fundamentally intertwined with the next and not as an individual domain. My analysis must be understood as a collective body of decolonial work, but that is not to say that this thesis is an exhaustive manifesto of what doing decolonial work means at the neoliberal university.

In chapter three I showed how doing decolonial work needs to include a transformation of our teaching and knowledge production through curriculum change, rethinking epistemology and methodology, and the languages that we use. The lack of representation in academia of marginalised communities replicates social inequalities by not placing equal value on their lived experiences. I argued that increased representation of the Other in our curriculum, our chosen epistemologies and methodologies is a way forward, but it comes with different concerns of how the 'outsider within' (Hill-Collins 1986) experiences the university as an institution that has historically justified their exclusion. Rethinking teaching and knowledge production requires that we understand ourselves as political subjects and practice self-reflexivity to understand the ways that we, as individuals and as a collective, reproduce social inequalities and exclusion.

I explored the representation of the Other at university further in chapter four, as I analysed the ways that the university environment alienates its students through the placement of statues and a lack of awareness toward how those with physical disabilities move around the

institutional space. Without the architectural framework to support those with physical disabilities at the university, it is without question that those with invisible disabilities may be even further marginalised (Kafer 2013). In much the same way, my analysis of economic/financial access highlights another invisible identity category – class. The co-option of the university by the neoliberal agenda has increased fees to the detriment of a free production of ideas and academic freedom (Dolmage 2018) and, instead, creates the ‘ideal’ citizen for the labour market (Bhambra, Nişancıoğlu and Gebriel 2020). Doing decolonial work cannot be utilised by the neoliberal agenda to rebrand the university, it must be about a fundamental restructuring of the university as a place that does not replicate social inequalities, but represents social justice and inclusion.

In chapter five, I showed the deep emotional toll of doing decolonial work and the necessity to view one another through caring relations. I critiqued policies and procedures to argue that they might ‘say’ something, but there is a stark difference between ‘saying and doing’ (Ahmed 2012). I situated my analysis by providing a close reading analysis of Utrecht University’s code of conduct where I argued that more specific, nuanced language would benefit how the relationship between management, staff and students might be read. Finally, positioning myself as a student within the university that I claim attachment to, yet also want to radically change, I highlighted the role of students in protest movements across the world and how they (read: we) hold a unique space in society as ‘apprentice intellectual workers’ (Toscano 2011) to challenge hegemony and envision a different future.

Through taking an intersectional framework, I have complicated the boundaries between four main axes of analysis, race, gender, class and (dis)ability, to show how truly interlocking levels of oppression are. The moment that each are addressed cannot be done in isolation, but lived experiences must be understood as complex, ambiguous and without a linear trajectory. This thesis has not explored different axes of analysis, such as sexuality, ethnicity and religion, and this has limited the scope of my research. As some scholars have pointed out (Byrd, Brunn-Bevel and Ovink 2019), sexuality in higher education is a topic that remains relatively unexplored, and I hope that future projects on decolonising the university further include marginalised groups that I have not. This would provide greater analysis into the ways that we might reimagine the university as a space that facilitates inclusion and enacts social justice.

Finally, this thesis has shown that we cannot achieve a ‘decolonised’ university because doing decolonial work is not an endpoint, it is a process. This process must be utilised if we want to create a university, a society, that is structured on social justice. Doing decolonial work is complex and multi-faceted, and we must support one another in order to elevate the position of the marginalised. Ahmed reminds us that, ‘when those who *are* important say [decolonising] *is* important, [decolonising] can *acquire* importance’ [italics in original] (Ahmed 2012; 59). It is therefore a collective struggle against hegemonic power structures, against coloniality, that we must work toward and needs to include dominant groups too. Doing decolonial work will be slow, it will be painful and uncomfortable, but we *must* take this path toward inclusion and freedom to liberate ourselves from oppressive structures and practices. We must have a future founded upon social justice and equality, and we must do it *now*.

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Appendix I. Interview Consent Form

MA Internship Research Report on Decolonising the University

Interview Consent Form

I, _____, hereby agree to participate in this study to be undertaken by Bethany Gum, and I understand that the purpose of the research is to explore how institutions of advanced gender studies are working toward decolonising the university.

I understand that:

1. The aims, method and possible outcomes of the research project have been explained to me;
2. I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my participation in the research study;
3. I will remain entirely anonymous: any information that may reveal my identity to another party will not be made public;
4. If I consider information to be sensitive I may decline to share it, or withdraw consent after having shared;
5. The data collected and the analysed results will be used for research purposes and will be included in the final internship report;
6. That I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the research project in which event my participation in the study will immediately cease. Any information obtained from me will not be used and permitted recordings and notes will be destroyed.
7. Please mark the following:
 - ◇ I give permission for our conversation to be recorded by the researcher.
 - ◇ I do not give permission for our conversation to be recorded by the researcher.
 - ◇ I give permission to the researcher to take notes during our conversation.
 - ◇ I do not give permission to the researcher to take notes during our conversation.

Participant Signature:

Date:

The contact details of the researcher are:

Bethany Gum

MA Gender Studies student at Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Portimão, Portugal

b.g.gum@students.uu.nl

The contact details of the RINGS internship supervisor are:

Deevia Bhana

Co-Chair of RINGS

DSI/NRF South African Research Chair (SARChI): Gender and Childhood Sexuality School
of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za

The contact details of the academic supervisor are:

Zerrin Cengiz

Lecturer and PhD Candidate

Department of Gender Studies and Media and Culture Studies

Drift 15, Room 2.04, 3512BR, Utrecht, The Netherlands

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Appendix II. Question Framework for Interviews

Remind participant:

- Consent for interview being recorded and taking notes / just to reiterate what was in the consent form, the information that you share in the interview will be used in my MA internship research project on decolonising the university. Your name and institution will be private and confidential and obviously not featured in the report.
- Semi-structured interview - more like a conversation - discussing how your institution has/has not decolonised.

Questions:

1. _____, you are a _____ in the discipline of _____ at the university _____. Could you tell me a bit more about your position at the university in terms of responsibility, what your role entails, your duties as _____?
2. In terms of what you just described, how does decolonising feature in your role? In what ways have you experienced the term 'decolonising' as a member of staff at your university?
3. Do you think your experience of decolonisation at your institution is a typical one compared to other [national] universities?
4. I think there is a tendency to hear the word 'decolonial' and assume that the issue of decolonising the university is solely about race. What I'm seeing more and more from my research is how intersectional decolonial work is and how multifaceted it is. As an expert in _____, how do you think universities can be more inclusive for _____ communities? In what ways do you think higher education can facilitate this inclusion?
5. The concern is, I think, in making the university a space for _____ aside from the dominant _____. In a recent article you did _____, it concludes by saying _____ and I'm really interested to hear more about how you think 'decolonising' the university will affect the _____?
6. I read another of your articles called _____, I really enjoyed reading it and thought it was an insightful study. In terms of _____, the construction of _____ identity, how do you think 'decolonising' would benefit people like _____?
7. Mbembe argues that to decolonise the university, the languages used at universities also need to be critiqued. I see that you have done research on _____, especially one study of

_____. As _____ has _____ official languages, what does it mean to ‘decolonise’ the university in terms of language in your context?

8. Let’s talk about this term ‘decolonise’. It’s gained momentum in universities more recently, Gurminder Bhambra writes about how the university has adopted this term as a way to discredit old ways of managing and structuring the university. So if the word ‘decolonise’ is now a buzzword, how do you think higher education institutions can take the process of decolonising more seriously?
9. Nayantara Appleton from Uni of Wellington is in favour of substituting the term ‘decolonise’ for different terms as she defines ‘decolonise’ very narrowly and situates it in a settler colonial context where ‘to decolonise’ is to return land and resources to the indigenous communities. She instead proposes:
 - a. Diversify your syllabus and curriculum
 - b. Digress from the canon
 - c. Decentre knowledge and knowledge production
 - d. Devalue hierarchies
 - e. Disinvest from citation structures
 - f. Diminish some voices and opinions in meetings while magnifying othersHow would you respond to this? Would HE institutions benefit more from specific, concrete goals rather than this broad, unclear definition of ‘decolonising’?
10. Can/should we do away with the term ‘decolonising’? What kind of impact would removing the term ‘decolonising’ have and is it even possible?

Appendix III. Internship Research Report

‘Decolonisation: A Local or Global Phenomenon?’

During my time as a master’s student in Gender Studies at Utrecht University, the theme of ‘decolonising the university’ appeared in a call for papers by the student-led graduate Humanities journal, *Junctions*. As a BA History student, having studied colonial India, empirical China and twentieth-century Britain, I questioned what it meant to use the term ‘decolonial’ in postmodern society. I was taking the course ‘Postcolonial Transitions and Transnational Justice’, reading Achille Mbembe, Frantz Fanon, Eve Tuck, Gurminder Bhambra, Walter D. Mignolo, Catherine Walsh, Maria Lugones and more. I entered the field of postcolonial theory and decolonial thought, I co-wrote a position paper on decolonising the university and conducted an interview with the chair of the UU Graduate Gender Studies program, Rosemarie Buikema, both to be published in *Junctions* in the next month.⁴⁶ During my internship with RINGS, I delved deeper into this term ‘decolonising’, trying to understand what higher education institutions do to ‘decolonise’ and how a historically-rooted term is situated in today’s context. As this research project evolved, it became clear that the fundamental element to understand how to use the term ‘decolonising’ lay explicitly in its politics of location. So if a term like ‘decolonising’ is so tightly bound by its context, what does it mean for an international association, such as RINGS, to use the term ‘decolonise’? This article first aims to show the difference in international calls to decolonise the university by outlining some of the protest movements demanding change. Second, I analyse how definitions of theories decolonisation change meaning across the world, bringing forth a common thread in how the term is used which is useful to the RINGS framework. Third, I reveal what doing ‘decolonial’ work means in praxis at higher education institutions. Last, I argue for continued self-reflexivity and critical analysis in research by inviting my reader to consider questions around decoloniality and RINGS.

Calls to Decolonise the University

⁴⁶ The position paper will be published in the Junctions: Graduate Journal of the Humanities call for papers. Exact publication date is unknown but expected in May 2021: <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/ubiquity-partner-network/up/journal/junction/call%20for%20position%20papers.pdf> Last accessed: 6th April 2021; The academic interview titled ‘Negotiating, Navigating and the Neoliberal University: Talking with Rosemarie Buikema’ is under review and will be a part of Junction’s issue on ‘Decolonizing the University’. Exact publication date unknown but expected in May 2021.

Across the world, calls for the university space to ‘decolonise’ have gained ground in recent years. In 2015, student-led protests erupted in Cape Town with the #RhodesMustFall movement, beginning a procession of protests to remove Cecil Rhodes’ statue across the globe.⁴⁷ In the UK at Oxford University, students protested for the removal of Rhodes’ statue and triumphed. However, as much of a success as this was, a government survey conducted in 2016 showed that 59% of the British public felt the statue should remain and a staggering 44% of this number stated that we should be proud of British colonialism. A pitifully small number of participants, 11%, argued it should be taken down whilst 29% participants stated ‘don’t know’.⁴⁸ The UK’s National Union of Students ran ‘Why is My Curriculum White?’ and #LiberateMyDegree, whilst across the Atlantic, students at Harvard Law School in the USA fought for the removal of the Harvard Law School shield that included an emblem of Isaac Royall Jr., a member of a renowned slave owning family.⁴⁹ In April 2015 in the Netherlands, students from Nieuw Universiteit (New University) in Amsterdam protested and occupied an administrative building, opposed to the neoliberal university, resulting in the birth of the University of Colour (UoC). The primary aim of UoC is, according to their website, to ‘decolonize the university’ by aspiring ‘to create a more balanced university at both curricular and demographic level that includes non-Eurocentric perspectives and ideas’.⁵⁰

Furthermore, calls to decolonise the university to prevent it from being a private institution embedded within the neoliberal, capitalist market have broken out internationally. In 2011, the Occupy Wall Street protests in the USA fought for economic equality and called for better access to education, much like the Los Indignados protests in Spain of the same year. In 2017, an article written by Karen Gabriel and P.K. Vijayan, shows us that colleges in India are becoming increasingly privatised in the name of ‘autonomy’ leading to decreased access for students from poorer backgrounds. They state that ‘colleges that were once considered ‘elite’ because of the quality of their education and their high academic performances, will now become ‘elite’ because of whom they cater to and how much they cost’.⁵¹ At the end of 2019, the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi increased student accommodation fees by as much

⁴⁷ DW News. [‘South Africa University Removes Cecil Rhodes Statue’](#). Original source: Reuters. 9th April 2015; and for a more detailed account, Eve Fairbanks. [‘The birth of Rhodes Must Fall’](#). The Guardian. 18th November 2015.

⁴⁸ Will Dahlgreen. [‘Rhodes must not fall’](#). YouGov. 18th January 2016.

⁴⁹ Anemona Hartocollis. [‘Harvard Law to Abandon Crest Linked to Slavery’](#). 4th March 2016.

⁵⁰ University of Colour website. Last accessed: 8th April 2021. <https://universityofcolour.com/>

⁵¹ Karen Gabriel and P.K. Vijayan. [‘With Colleges Fighting for Autonomy, Higher Education Has a Lot to Lose’](#). The Wire. 30th April 2017.

as 150% leading to student protests and a police crackdown.⁵² A higher education fee increase is also echoed in the UK's 2012 reforms, the year I began my bachelor's degree, where fees were tripled from £3,290 per annum to £9,000.⁵³ Similarly, in South Africa following #RhodesMustFall came #FeesMustFall in 2015, dubbed the 'the largest student protests since the end of apartheid in 1994'.⁵⁴ Students demanded reduced university fees which generated a different discourse that, instead of focusing on ideological and symbolic coloniality, attended to demands around class and poverty. This movement paved the way for the larger Fallist movement in South Africa that actively fights against remaining traces of colonialism. As I consider the state of the university and student protest movements across the world attempting to decolonise the university space, it is clear that the term 'decolonise' aims to achieve different goals dependent upon geopolitical location. The context in which the term is used means we need to understand the nuances of discriminatory policies and procedures in place at universities across the world. We need to continue learning how the term is utilised by different protest movements, to understand the varied ways that 'decolonise' is situated within institutions and continue our self-reflexive research that constantly questions our situatedness.



A student demands reduced fees at Jawaharlal Nehru University in India during protests. Cited on Aljazeera. '[As India's JNU protests fee hike, poor students fear for future](#)'. Photo credit: Danish Siddiqui/Reuters.

⁵² Bilal Kuchay. '[As India's JNU protests fee hike, poor students fear for future](#)'. AlJazeera. 20th November 2019.

⁵³ Sean Coughlan. '[Students face tuition fees rising to £9,000](#)'. BBC News. 3rd November 2010.

⁵⁴ Pumza Fihlani. '[We are students thanks to South Africa's #FeesMustFall protests](#)'. BBC News. 30th April 2019.



A banner held by students protesting against the neoliberal university in Amsterdam that led to the creation of the University of Colour in the Netherlands. Cited on Change.org: [‘Petition · University of Colour - Diversify and Decolonize the University · Change.org’](#).



Students protest for the removal of Cecil Rhodes' statue in Cape Town, South Africa on 9th April 2021. Photograph: Rodger Bosch/AFP/Getty Images. Cited on The Guardian: [The birth of Rhodes Must Fall | South Africa](#).

Theoretical Understandings of Decolonial

Whilst universities may have attended to the calls for decolonising from student protests, it is not new to scholars in feminist theory, gender studies and critical thinking, that the term ‘decolonise’ is in danger of being used by institutions superficially. In an attempt to overtly tackle discriminatory practices and behaviours, the term ‘decolonise’, alongside ‘diversity’; ‘inclusivity’; and ‘equality’, has gained traction because it sells well. Higher education institutions are very much at risk of using overusing and misunderstanding ‘decolonising’ and emptying it of any meaning that it carries. Tuck and Yang (2012) warn us that decolonising is not a metaphor and show us that to decolonise, we need to repatriate land and resources to indigenous communities. To misappropriate ‘decolonise’ and use it as a metaphor, ‘recentres whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future’.⁵⁵ If we are to use ‘decolonise’ as a word and avoid, what Tuck and Yang call, a ‘settler move to innocence’, we need to go beyond the framework of potentially co-opting the term. In concurrence with Bhabra, Gebrial and Nişancioğlu (2018), I believe it is valuable to work beyond the limitations of Tuck and Yang’s definition of decolonise ‘in order to extend and deepen their political warning’⁵⁶ that decolonisation is not a metaphor and understand how else it has been applied. Moving beyond this definition, we are able to see what unites localised movements that name themselves ‘decolonial’. We are able to understand the nuances of oppression and the intricacies of power relations in what social movements direct themselves against with more precision.

However, before we move beyond Tuck and Yang’s application of decolonisation, I must merit their work as their definition has been particularly useful because of how they situate the term. The authors insist that ‘decolonise’ must be understood within the context of settler colonialism, particularly in the Americas and Australia. It is not a term that can be employed in any other context. Mbembe, in contrast, says of South African society that ‘today the consensus is that part of what is wrong with our institutions of higher learning is that they are “Westernized”’.⁵⁷ He further adds that to decolonise the institution means for some, that we should to replace Eurocentrism with a process of Africanization in education. However, he

⁵⁵ Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang. 2012. ‘Decolonization is not a metaphor.’ *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education & Society*, Vol. 1 No. 1, 3.

⁵⁶ Gurminder K. Bhabra, Dalia Gebrial and Kerem Nişancioğlu (eds.) 2018. ‘Introduction’ in *Decolonising the University*. London: Pluto Press, 4.

⁵⁷ Achille J. Mbembe. 2016. ‘Decolonizing the University: New Directions’. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, Vol. 15 (1). 32.

rightly reminds us of Frantz Fanon's warning that 'Africanization' is to continue racial thinking.⁵⁸ Having replaced the position of the colonisers, the national bourgeoisie's policies have the effect of disillusioning the masses leading to a 'falling back toward old tribal attitudes' where Africanization is to 'replace the foreigner'. Fanon describes feeling 'furious and sick at heart' upon seeing fellow Africans attacking fellow Africans in the name of Africanization. In other words, the decolonising project in South Africa, may have been equivocated with 'Africanization' showing us another way decolonisation is interpreted.

These are only two theoretical stand-points of how the term decolonise has been utilised, but they demonstrate how varied and contextualised the definition of 'decolonising' is. Many other decolonial scholars (Andrews 2018; Icaza and Vázquez 2018; Lugones 2010; Maldonado-Torres 2011; Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Smith 1988) have published work that contextualises their experience and shows us further the shades of meaning that 'decolonial' carries. It is especially notable that in the last few years, a growth in scholarship around decolonising the university has emerged and continues to flourish. *Decolonising the University* (2018) by Bhabra, Gebrial and Nişancioğlu and *The University and Social Justice. Struggles Across The Globe* (2020) by Chowdry and Vally are two excellent examples of edited books that include a wide range of topics on decolonising the university from a number of geopolitical locations. With the ever-expanding field of decolonial theory, it is inevitable that more variegated understandings of what it means to 'decolonise the university' are imagined and put into practice to generate transformative change.

Decolonial theory is important to us all as academics because of the way that it intersects with feminist theory, queer theory, posthumanist thinking, new materialism, critical race theory and others. As a theory fit for interdisciplinary use, we can make use of decolonial thinking in light of our different disciplines, fields and areas of expertise. As Omarjee (2018) reflects in the introduction of her book, decolonial theory, for her, has come from a desire to do things differently. She says that 'the more I learn the more I realise that nuance is the best way to blur the lines of supremacies by making us understand our own vulnerabilities and strengths.'⁵⁹ As scholars, with a desire to do things differently, we can incorporate decolonial theory into our research due to its irrevocable intertwinedness in all that we do.

⁵⁸ Frantz Fanon. 1961. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.

⁵⁹ Nadira Omarjee. 2018. *Reimagining the Dream: Decolonising Academia by Putting the Last First*. African Studies Centre Leiden: African Studies Collection, vol. 72. 14.

Decolonising the University in Praxis

To dismantle the power structures that have been handed down to us from colonialism and move towards a 'decolonial' future, we need to re-invent tools that will liberate knowledge production from the confines of colonial definitions and move past oppressive ways of being. It is true that some institutions may be in danger of emptying 'decolonisation' of its meaning by employing superficial and cosmetic changes to the institution without generating any real, structural change. However, it is important that institutions are making steps towards giving individuals from marginalised communities space within higher education, whether it is to teach or to learn, in order to create institutions that are more inclusive.

One of Utrecht University's main policies and key buzzwords is 'diversity'. They pride themselves on being an 'International Research University' with a diverse student population and a relatively new Diversity Dean. After interviewing Rosemarie Buikema in March 2021, it confirmed for me that there is a general understanding amongst those in positions of power at UU of the need to have a diverse group of staff and students. We know that simply "adding" more faculty and hiring a Diversity Dean does not necessarily generate the structural change we demand. Appleton (2019) is all too aware of this fact and argues that employing the language of 'diversity' and 'decolonisation' does not achieve enough. It is not specific to a European context and instead, she argues we should use more specific and direct terminology if we are to achieve any change. She suggests that we 'diversify...[our] syllabus and curriculum', 'digress from the canon', 'decentre knowledge and knowledge production', 'devalue hierarchies', 'disinvest from citational power structures' and 'diminish some voices and opinions in meetings, while magnifying others'.⁶⁰ To heed Appleton's advice would be a move away from Eurocentric canons and a white-washed curriculum to include histories of coloniality, Black Studies, Disability Studies, and more. It is also important to celebrate the importance of local languages in academia instead of allowing English to prevail as the primary way to speak in the field of research. We must move away from traditional ways of knowing to explore and honour epistemologies from marginalised communities. By employing a more

⁶⁰ Nayantara S. Appleton. ['Do Not 'Decolonize' . . . If You Are Not Decolonizing: Progressive Language and Planning Beyond a Hollow Academic Rebranding.'](#) Critical Ethnic Studies Journal. University of Minnesota Press. Posted: 4th February 2019.

definitive, specific list of goals as Appleton suggests, we may become more successful in our primary goal of decolonising the university.

When considering curriculum changes, diverse faculty and student population, diverse citational practices, and so on, I am reminded of Audre Lorde when she told us ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’.⁶¹ To achieve the above criteria and make steps towards a curriculum that is not Eurocentric and white-washed is important, but we are still working within the same institutional framework. We need to be more imaginative to fully decolonise the university which means we must turn to alternative epistemologies, ontologies and methodologies. Toward an environment that nurtures different perspectives outside of the claustrophobic confines of academic guidelines and expectations. In discussing dismantling the master’s house, during an interview, a scholar asked me what might come next if decolonising is about removing. To discuss removal, meant to discuss abolition, and to discuss abolition, meant to discuss replacement. So if we are to decolonise universities, what comes next? If we succeed in decolonising the university, assuming that it is possible, how do we re-create a space that does not maintain or reestablish the same inequalities, the same logics of pedagogical or research practices, but reincarnates our society one step further towards a Utopic university/society? Perhaps I am being unrealistic, too far-fetched, a Utopian society is too abstract and impossible, but it is precisely beyond our current scope of understanding that we must strive to be, think and know if we want to decolonise the institution. Reinventing tools will not come from reproduced epistemologies, constricted methodologies, it will come from being creative, different, fresh.

But, as we know, merely ‘adding’ staff and students is not enough, we cannot only include students from diverse backgrounds, ‘edit’ the curriculum or create positions for Deans to monitor and foster inclusion. Creating these changes as simple add-ons to a current way of being is not transforming or restructuring, but a continuation of building onto the very structure that we desire to change. What an overwhelming task this is. So whilst we are working on re-imagining and re-inventing ways of restructuring the university so it is an inclusive space, these steps are a way to fill terminology like ‘equality’, ‘diversity’, ‘decolonial’ with some practical meaning and explicitly visible change. If every academic invested in one step, for example their citation tactics, the process would, as Clare Hemmings tells us, ‘be one that...open[s] up

⁶¹ Audre Lorde. 1984. *Sister Outsider*. New York: Random House. 123.

and foreground[s] absence, provide[s] a break in the monotony of the repeated, and suggest[s] other historiographies that are politically and theoretically transparent'.⁶² By working as a collective to change the ways that we produce and create knowledge by following Appleton's list as a guideline, as academics and as political subjects in our own right, we are working towards the drive to 'decolonise the university'.

An Invitation to Answer: RINGS and Decolonisation

I have shown the ways that the term 'decolonial' is used in protests around the world that are demanding 'decolonise the university'. Although each protest movement is defined by its specific context, what is inherently shared is the anger and discontent from activists and representational authorities that show us how the university is built on exclusion. Some institutions and governments have begun introducing policies that attempt to make the university more inclusive, but is it enough? Again, decolonial theorists define decolonisation in ways that are specific to their own politics of location making it more difficult, not impossible, to have a universal, shared understanding of decolonisation. What is inherent to protest movements, theories of decolonisation and decolonisation in praxis is the fundamental desire to change the university as an institution built on exclusionary power structures embedded in colonial thinking that has not yet been dismantled. We must continue critiquing our own positionality and insist on practicing self-reflexivity so that fundamental differences are understood and nuances in decolonial thought are visibly present. So, with this in mind, I invite my reader to ponder the following questions:

- ❖ How can RINGS as a transnational feminist association of higher education institutions decolonise?
- ❖ What does it mean for an international association to decolonise if 'to decolonise' is so contextually specific?
- ❖ As academics in critical thinking, how do we be *in* the university space without being *of* the university space?
- ❖ What can we do to re-create a university space that does not re-establish or re-enforce exclusion? Is this even possible?

⁶² Clare Hemmings. 2011. 'Citation Tactics' in *Why Stories Matter. The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. London: Duke University Press. 190.

- ❖ How do we dissolve boundaries so that those that are excluded are allowed ‘in’?
- ❖ In what ways can RINGS be decolonial in praxis and theory?
- ❖ How can we foster self-reflexivity and critical analysis in more than our own discipline and field of expertise? How can we further disperse feminist methodologies?
- ❖ Finally, a quote from Angela Last (2018) to reflect upon: ‘While we may not be able to change practices during our career, we can at least embed these queries into our work.’⁶³

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⁶³ Angela Last. 2018. ‘Internationalisation and Interdisciplinarity: Sharing across Boundaries?’ in *Decolonising the University*. Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial and Kerem Nişancıoğlu (eds.) London: Pluto Press. 208-230.

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Appendix IV. Utrecht University's Code of Conduct

Please see separate PDF file or access online:

https://www.uu.nl/sites/default/files/en_code_of_conduct_uu.pdf