

Decolonising the Curriculum in the Time of Pandemic

The Gathering: Stimuli for Discussion

Decolonisation of the curriculum is the process of analysing and interrogating how disciplines have been shaped by colonial history, and the impact of this on individuals and communities. The decolonising process seeks to challenge and dismantle the ways in which academia operates to privilege the needs of some groups and marginalise those of others. This document is a conversation starter, designed to prompt discussion about the ways in which you are, or could be, decolonising the curriculum in your context.

You will notice that under each example is a set of questions created to help frame your discussion. We ask that before discussion, someone in your group volunteers to capture your responses in this collaborative document.

We acknowledge that some of the prompts and conversations might feel uncomfortable or tense for you and it might be difficult to start talking. In the spirit of this Gathering, we ask you to bear this in mind, acknowledge that this is a journey and we are each in our own contexts with our own experiences and we need to be respectful of those diverse perspectives if we can genuinely begin those conversations, regardless of the colour of our skin, the language(s) we speak or the stories we've heard.

Catriona Cunningham and Marita Grimwood
University of Stirling
February 2021

Stimulus 1: 'Everywhere'



'Everywhere' by Roxanna Munir (PhD Researcher @ GCU)

'The central figure is composed of numerous skin tones layered by palette knife, highlighting the broad diversity in science across the world. The layers work in unison to compose a single person, indicating the connectivity and collaborative aspects of science. There are subtle suggestions of glasses, a hearing aid and piercings again supposed to indicate the broad reach and accessibility of science. The person is surrounded by stereotypical vintage science illustrations to indicate both the broad definition of science (as it ultimately encompasses all things) and highlighting the "beginnings" as we have now progressed to digital imaging. The colours behind the figure hint at a rainbow, to signify LGBT+ inclusion in science too. Lastly, the artwork being imaged on a mirror is to ultimately indicate that anyone, anywhere is part of science in their own way, as we encounter it in everyday life – everywhere!'

Roxanna Munir, who is completing a PHD in Spinal Muscular Atrophy at Glasgow Caledonian University, was crowned the winner of [SULSA's Through the Looking Glass: Breaking Barriers in STEM Art Competition](#).

- 1 Does this example feel meaningful to you?
- 2 Does this example feel relevant to your practice?
- 3 What question does it leave you with?

Stimulus 2: The Danger of a Single Story

Transcript: [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story](#)



We use **the first four minutes** of this TED talk in our PG cert in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education to encourage academic teachers to identify their own 'single stories' and to begin the process of dismantling those assumptions and prejudices we all have about our learners and indeed our role as teachers.

- 1 Looking at **the first four minutes of the film clip or transcript**, does this example feel meaningful to you?
- 2 Does this example feel relevant to your practice?
- 3 What question does it leave you with?

Stimulus 3: Using film to discuss religion, gender, and discrimination



This image is from a short film we use in French called *Mariam* (2016, dir Faiza Ambah). We use it to introduce our students to general debates about Islam in French society and also to more specific issues surrounding the 2004 law banning conspicuous religious symbols in French schools. We begin our analysis of the film by exploring the understandings/ perceptions students might have of the 'veil' and getting them to think about its complexity as a symbol. We use lots of other images of veils to get the conversation going.

(With thanks and acknowledgements to Dr Aedín Ní Loingsigh, Division of Literature and Languages, University of Stirling.

For Stirling colleagues, note that the 45-min film is available to stream via the library.)

- 1 Does this example feel meaningful to you?
- 2 Does this example feel relevant to your practice?
- 3 What question does it leave you with?

Stimulus 4: Using film to discuss questions of privilege, marginalisation, and media representation



This image is from the film *The Milk of Sorrow* (*La teta asustada*, Claudia Llosa 2006). It is a Peruvian film in both Spanish and Quechua about transgenerational trauma following the period of internal violence in Peru in a Quechua family on the outskirts of Lima who migrated like many others due to the internal conflict. We use the film to focus on questions of gender violence but also postcolonial ethnic divisions, raising questions about why Indigenous communities around Ayacucho were so disproportionately affected by the violence and the barriers that are shown as existing between state institutions and marginalised populations in Peru. We also focus on a debate that arose around the film shortly after its release, where the director, a mestiza woman Claudia Llosa, received accusations of reinforcing stereotypes and representing a negative image of Indigenous Andean communities in her film. This becomes a talking point for thinking about our own positions, white privilege, and questions of representation in the media and more widely. The film also raises questions about the place of co-official Indigenous languages in the Peruvian state and in national media and film.

(With thanks and acknowledgements to Dr Peter Baker, Division of Literature and Languages, University of Stirling)

- 1 Does this example feel meaningful to you?
- 2 Does this example feel relevant to your practice?
- 3 What question does it leave you with?

Stimulus 5: Economics and Power – Gains & Conflict

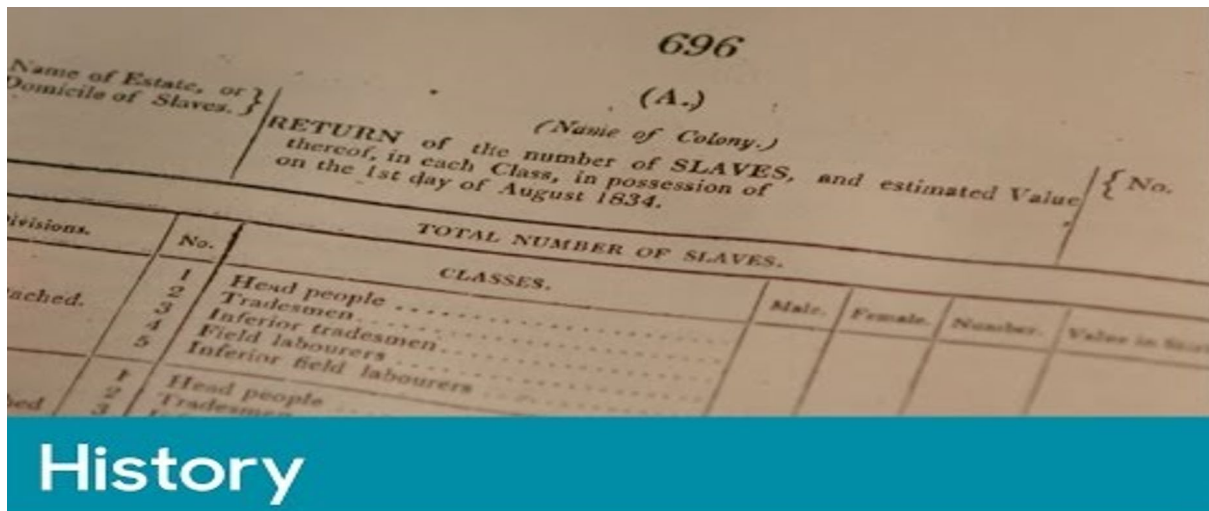


Evicted Sharecroppers. Library of Congress, Washington DC, 1939.

This image shows a family of black sharecroppers after being evicted due to inability to pay their landlords. They sit with their belongings on the roadside in Missouri, in 1939.

The conventional approach to teaching introductory economics – a subject that fundamentally addresses how individuals interact and exchange with one another – is through abstract, simplified examples which are predominantly Western and lacking diversity. A typical example: *Tom and Jerry both have different quantities of pizza and ice cream, and they want to know how to make the most efficient exchange.*

The image above signifies how two of these fundamental concepts in economics are now taught here at Stirling: efficiency and fairness. Efficiency is usually the only dimension of evaluation, where efficiency gains are addressed objectively and with cold calculation. Here, in this very first module in economics, students new to the subject also must address fairness, which is often neglected by the discipline. Moreover, the very same concepts of indifference curves, endowments, and bargaining power are taught through the example of the abolishment of slavery in the 19th century in the US, but juxtaposing this with sharecropping (often described as slavery by another name). This leads to a much wider discussion of how individuals are exploited throughout the world, including the 40 million people in modern slavery, and how bestowed privilege can prevent the changing of the institutions that keep wealth with the powerful. Students are also confronted with the impact of colonialisation on western economies, where the gains for some are at the cost of many, including those who needed to be compensated for their loss of property:

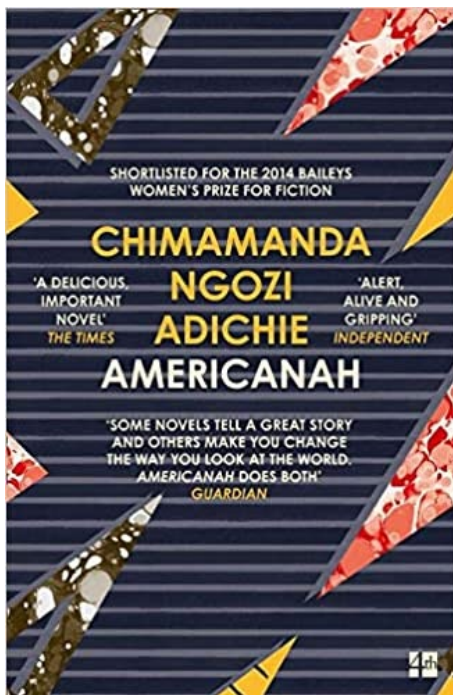


[Why British slave owners received compensation | History - Britain's Forgotten Slave Owners](#)

(With thanks and acknowledgements to Dr Paul Cowell, Division of Economics, Stirling Management School, University of Stirling)

- 1 Does this example feel meaningful to you?
- 2 Does this example feel relevant to your practice?
- 3 What question does it leave you with?

Stimulus 6: Learning, teaching and cultural difference



In this extract from the novel *Americanah*, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the Nigerian narrator is attending university in America for the first time.

'School in America was easy, assignments sent in by e-mail, classrooms air-conditioned, professors willing to give make-up tests. But she was uncomfortable with what the professors called "participation", and did not see why it should be part of the final grade; it merely made students talk and talk, class time wasted on obvious words, hollow words, sometimes meaningless words. It had to be that Americans were taught, from elementary school, to always *say something* in class, no matter what. And so she sat stiff-tongued, surrounded by students who were all folded easily on their seats, all flush with knowledge, not of the subject of the classes, but of how to *be* in the classes. They never said "I don't know." They said, instead, "I'm not sure," which did not give any information but still suggested the possibility of knowledge.'

- 1 Does this example feel meaningful to you?
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Stimulus 7: Maths – an international language?



Photo by [John Moeses Bauan](#) on [Unsplash](#)

'In Maths, there can be great disagreement as to whether to use brackets in our expressions for trigonometric functions. In the UK it is common to use $\sin x$ and $\cos x$ to express these functions, whereas elsewhere you will find they will use $\sin(x)$ and $\cos(x)$. I favour the latter method of expressing these functions, but you will find others who strongly disagree.'

(With thanks and acknowledgements to Dr Nora Tanner, University of Stirling)

- 1 Does this example feel meaningful to you?
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Stimulus 8: Disrupting the narrative of 'global' education



Photo by [Joshua Rawson-Harris](#) on [Unsplash](#)

'A key decolonial critique is that knowledge produced in the West has been universalised as the only legitimate form of knowledge. It is claimed that the European location of modernity is "cloaked in the rhetoric of universality" and that Eurocentricism is based on "confusion between abstract universality and concrete world hegemony derived from Europe's position as centre" (Mignolo 2010, 317).' (Morreira et al. p14)

Our institution's selling point is a 'British' education (thus perpetuating the myth of universality of knowledge produced in the 'West') - the challenge for us is how to decolonise our offer when many (particularly on our campuses outside the UK) place a premium on this 'Western' education. A further challenge is how to discuss issues of exclusion and power when different communities are in the majority in different countries.

References

Mignolo, W. 2007. "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality." *Cultural Studies* 21 (2-3): 449-514. doi:10.1080/09502380601162647.

Morreira, S., Lockett, K., Kumalo, S. H., & Ramgotra, M. (2020) Confronting the complexities of decolonising curricula and pedagogy in higher education, *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 5:1-2, 1-18, DOI: 10.1080/23802014.2020.1798278

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Stimulus 9: The Lone Ranger – erasing history?



The Lone Ranger was a 30-minute western action series on American TV about a masked man and his Native American sidekick (Tonto) who aided those who were being preyed upon by the rich, criminals, and other evildoers (above right).

Bass Reeves (above left) was the first black Deputy US marshal in his locale. His exploits as a law enforcement officer who is strongly believed to have inspired the Lone Ranger character.

Facts about the Wild Wild West

- By the late 19th century roughly [one in three cowboys](#) (known as vaqueros) was Mexican.
- The recognizable cowboy fashions, technologies, and [lexicon](#) - hats, bandanas, spurs, stirrups, lariat, lasso - [are all Latino inventions](#).
- Many later cowboys were African slaves (cowboy work was hard labour).
- Chinese immigrants also contributed to the development of the west.

Relate the preceding facts with your knowledge/understanding of the West discussed initially.

- Who/what has been erased from depictions of the 'West'? Why do you think this has happened?
- Are you aware of any erasure in your own discipline/sphere of control? What do you need to do about it?

(With thanks and acknowledgements to Dr Lindy-Ann Blaize Alfred, Sheffield Hallam University)

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Stimulus 10: Decolonisation - Why, specifically, universities?

'Here's something from my PgCAP course that I use to help people understand why it's important for universities to take responsibility for colonising.

Ideology of colonialism

It was in the university that colonial intellectuals developed theories of racism, popularised discourses that bolstered support for colonial endeavours and provided ethical and intellectual grounds for the dispossession, oppression and domination of colonised subjects.

In the colonial metropolis, universities provided would-be colonial administrators with knowledge of the peoples they would rule over, as well as lessons in techniques of domination and exploitation. The foundation of European higher education institutions in colonised territories itself became an infrastructure of empire, an institution and actor through which the totalising logic of domination could be extended;

European forms of knowledge were spread, local indigenous knowledge suppressed, and native informants trained. In both colony and metropole, universities were founded and financed through the spoils of colonial plunder, enslavement and dispossession.

(Bhambra, Gebrial & Nişancioğlu, 2018 p.5) Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial and Kerem Nişancioğlu (2018) *Decolonising the University*. London: Pluto Press

Western Ontologies

- Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840) divided the human species into five races (though no difference in innate abilities)
- Louis Agassiz (1807–1873) – 'polygenism' – humans descended from different ancestors (used to justify slavery)
- Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882) – superiority of white (Aryan) race and culture (opposed colonisation because of miscegenation)
- Thomas Huxley (1825 –1895) – Darwinist but proposed a hierarchy of abilities to do with racial features

Colonial activities, particularly in European history are generally typified by:

- occupation of land
- appropriation of resources
- imposition of coloniser's culture, beliefs and knowledge
- erasure, denigration and/or misrepresentation of indigenous history, culture and knowledge
- coloniser's culture and beliefs viewed as superior
- dehumanisation of indigenous population - viewed as subhuman, inferior or non-human.'

(With thanks and acknowledgements to Dr Rayya Ghul, University of Edinburgh for sharing)

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Stimulus 11: Beginning programme-level decolonisation

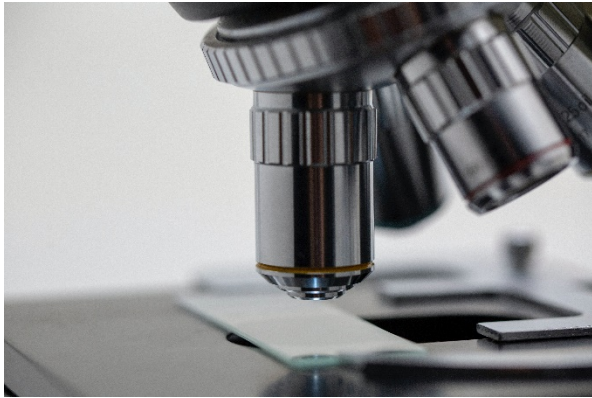


Photo by [Michael Longmire](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The School of Psychology & Neuroscience at St Andrews carried out an inclusive curriculum audit of its sub-honours psychology teaching during the summer of 2020. Four undergraduate psychology students were employed to collect data (via Moodle) on the module reading lists, case studies, images of people in slides and topics covered, and the data were used to prompt discussions at a whole-School staff meeting on inclusive curricula, where teaching staff also shared examples of current good practice.

(With thanks and acknowledgement to Dr. Paula Miles & Dr Gillian Brown, University of St Andrews)

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Stimulus 12: The need to decolonise healthcare - an example from Dentistry



We know that people from ethnic minorities are significantly more likely to die of Covid - and this is one reflection of the field's inherent biases. How can we train future health care professionals to help change these inequalities?

An example from Dentistry:

Student Experience

- First time she was performing an intra-oral exam in a patient with dark skin
- Seeing darkening on the gingiva she was concerned as it was something she had never seen before
- Gingival pigmentation, which commonly presents in dark skin
- For the patient, it is distressing to hear you have a concerning patch in your mouth

Solutions – First steps

- Integrate different presentations of disease into teaching
- Promote taking more clinical photos on a variety of skin colours
- Raise awareness amongst peers
- Continue discussions about our experiences to identify more gaps that need to be addressed

Oral racial pigmentation	Oral melanoma
Symmetrical	Darker brown/ black
Often along the gingivae	Asymmetrical, diffuse irregular borders
Well defined borders	Changes size over time
Usually remains the same over time	May be associated with ulceration, bleeding and pain

(With thanks and acknowledgements to Desmond Manangazira BSc. MSc., University of Dundee)

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Stimulus 13: The Media and portrayal of indigenous people



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed

This poster depicts a Hollywood remake of the Lone Ranger story (2013) where Johnny Depp takes on the role of the Native American 'sidekick'. Is Depp's portrayal of a non- white person problematic? Why/why not?

Comanche Chairman Wallace Coffey an elected official for the Comanche people states in an interview:

"I think it was a very realistic portrayal of a Native American. It's got drama and it's got a lot of comedy; it fits right in with Comanche culture because we are well known as a humorous people," he says. Coffey adds that he was pleased by the spiritual elements of the Tonto character, as an accurate enough nod to the relationship between a Native American of that time period and the environment in which he lived. Depp ... has also personally reached out to the Comanche people, an effort that Coffey says has been much appreciated.' (Rothman, 2013)

What does the quote above reflect? How can we apply this to our own discipline/selves?

(With thanks and acknowledgements to Dr Lindy-Ann Blaize Alfred, Sheffield Hallam University)

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Stimulus 14: Object Based Learning: More than just subject learning

Overview: Teaching a course on creative pedagogies for HE educators, involves a transdisciplinary session on using object-based learning. We usually visit our university's associated museum collections and our course participants experience objects from the collections. They are encouraged to think about ways of integrating the collections into their own subjects. However, handling the objects always leads to debates about colonial history, power, and knowledge creation.

You can search the collections: [University of Glasgow - The Hunterian - Collections - Search our Collections](#) (the image below was taken during the object-based learning session in The Hunterian teaching rooms).



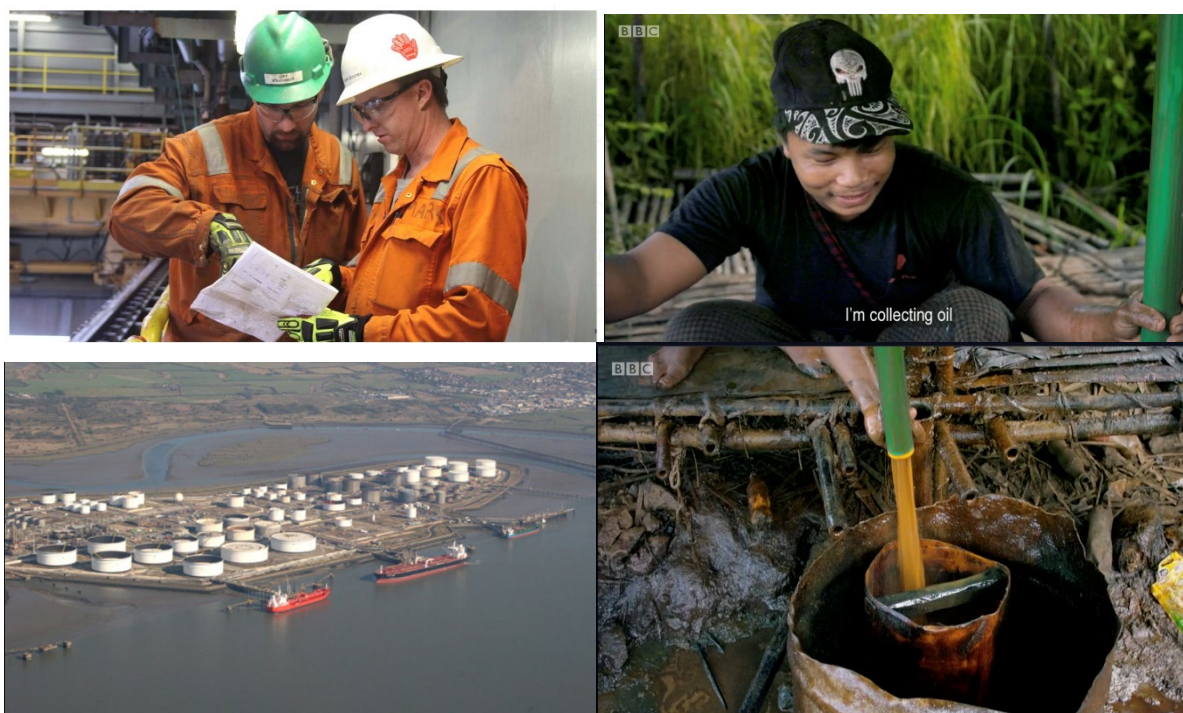
Questions we are debating in the course:

- 1 How could you use these objects for in your subject (if you could use these)? (e.g. chemistry re colours & materials)
- 2 Are you aware of knowledge biases in your discipline?
- 3 What are structures and processes that determine valid knowledge?
- 4 How do you integrate knowledge critique within your discipline, can an object's history not only aid learning on the object but also learning about knowledge?

(With thanks and acknowledgements to Dr Nathalie Sheridan & Dr Vicki HM Dale, University of Glasgow)

- 1 Does this example feel meaningful to you?
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Stimulus 15: The representation of superiority



The student-teacher asked a class of 14-year-olds to discuss the process of petroleum extraction and compare/contrast the health and safety measures taken in the two countries – Britain and Burma. The topic and learning outcomes were appropriately aligned to teach Nature's Chemistry part of the science curriculum. But:

- Does it portray that White British people are superior intellectually and well-equipped compared to Burmese people?
- Did the teacher unintentionally provoke the roots of inequity in the science classroom?

During the class discussion, Amjad was called-out by his class fellows to resemble the Burmese [Rohingya] man shown in the picture – although Amjad is Scottish, like others, and not Burmese – but why he was called out as Burmese? How will you resolve this issue?

(With thanks and acknowledgements to Dr Saima Salehjee, Lecturer in Education, School of Education, The University of Strathclyde)

- 1 Does this example feel meaningful to you?
- 2 Does this example feel relevant to your practice?
- 3 What question does it leave you with?

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