Research Article

Unlearning and Relearning Europe: Theoretical and Practical Approaches to Decolonising European Studies Curricula

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Abstract

Discussion on decolonising European Studies (ES) curriculum has gained traction in academic and activist circles, partly responding to calls to decolonise curricula that have brought attention to the 'whitewashing' of history and the critical lack of BIPOC scholarship taught in higher education syllabi. Current efforts to decolonise ES as a field of study have largely relied on these aspects. While this is undoubtedly an important step, many ES scholars have expressed a lack of clarity as to how this rhetoric can be practically adopted in their courses without compromising the central subject matter – Europe. This paper responds to calls to decolonise ES, by introducing different theoretical and practical approaches that educational practitioners within the field can draw from in the building of curricula.

Keywords

'While knowledge can never be total, the selections we make have consequences for its ordering' (Bhambra 2017: 28).

The decolonial discourse around higher education first emerged as a part of the broader 20th Century decolonial movements active in South America, Asia, and the African continent (Mamdani 1995). Decolonial efforts challenged colonialism and imperialism through political protest and mobilization, organized military revolt, and finally, intellectual and ideological resistance. These efforts rose against the romantic rhetoric of the empire's civilizing mission. They fought hard to resist particular modes of knowledge production that placed Europe and America at the epicentre of world history, thought, and development. Recognizing this, decolonial movements and discourses of the 21st century build on the rich and diverse body of early colonial resistance and decolonial thought to provoke epistemological questions on the production of knowledge and its reproduction (Gatsheni 2019). At their core, these movements aim to interrupt and interrogate a Eurocentric canon often presented both implicitly or explicitly as universal, truthful, and innocent. In this vein, a key background assumption in this paper is that the histories of Western global domination have affected and structured what we in the academy acknowledge as legitimate and authoritative knowledge. This includes, but is not limited to, the voices we choose to integrate and methods we use in teaching this knowledge (SOAS 2018).

The specific decolonial context this article centers on, is the call for decolonisation within the university, given its importance as a place for knowledge production. Universities have played a historic role as key infrastructure of empires and shying away from this history only deters and prevents us from having important conversations about the implications of such a role on knowledge production in the past, present, and future (Bhambra, 2018). This history of the university as an institution is inseparable from power relations that still affect what and how we learn. Consequently, the call for decolonisation in the context of the university discusses this legacy and its perpetuation in today's higher education curriculum.

While these decolonial movements have been intrinsic to the proliferation of decolonial discourse in the university, we lack consensus on how to approach and redress these issues. As a result, mainstream decolonisation movements focus their efforts on justifications for decolonial action with most attention being placed on the inclusion of BIPOC scholars or literature for the Global South. While this is a first step in this effort, diversifying reading lists is not the end-all and be-all of decolonising the curriculum. In fact, the impact of empire is much deeper and complex than that – it affects how we understand knowledge acquisition and production and has shaped some of the most basic concepts that help us understand societies. This lacking attention on the methodological approaches and theoretical discourses, which are central to decolonial transformations, is part and parcel of the widening interstice within the contemporary decolonial movements in European higher education.

Despite more active discussion about European imperial legacy in our curricula, European universities have seen little change at a program level. Certainly, decolonial efforts are no easy task; they require effort, time, and adequate funding – all of which are, arguably, scarce resources in higher education. Even more, if we can acknowledge the imperial legacy ingrained in our curricula, where should our decolonisation efforts begin? Though it is true that such a legacy is present in most disciplines, this article argues that a sound starting point for this discussion can be found in the field that puts Europe at its very core: European Studies. While some work has been done in this regard, for instance by the public open access lecture series of the Amsterdam Centre of European Studies (ACES) on *Decolonising Europe*, literature on decolonisation and the field of European studies is still limited.

Our article offers a first step in this direction by presenting a reflection on these discussions and aims to contribute to the growing literature of decolonisation in education. We focus on the theoretical and practical implications of efforts at decolonising the curriculum. Our overall objective is to equip those who hold institutional power with approaches to enable them to implement decolonial change as an indelible part of curriculum development and teaching practices. Recognizing this, this paper proposes a series of recommendations that educators, practitioners, and leaders in the field can reflect onto their curricula and teaching material.

With this in mind, the article proceeds as follows. First, we provide a general overview of the current discussions on decolonisation, as well as the potential pitfalls of decolonial action. We then take stock of current European Studies curricula across Europe to gain as comprehensive of a picture as possible. The article then addresses how we can approach the decolonisation of ES curricula without compromising Europe as a subject-matter. Further, we provide practical recommendations that educational practitioners in the field can draw from. Finally, we put forth some concluding thoughts on the future of ES as an evolving field.

DECOLONISING & PUSHBACK – WHERE DOES THE PUSH FOR DECOLONISATION COME FROM AND WHY IS METHODOLOGY IMPORTANT?

Decolonisation is a process that involves a multitude of different strategies, aims, and definitions. A key part of understanding decolonial work is to recognize that decolonisation is not a fixed definition but rather encompasses a range of contesting ideas and interpretations and has done so throughout the history of Decolonial Studies. This makes it even more pertinent, in approaching the subject of decolonisation, to situate our own understanding of the term. Looking at the canon of decolonial literature, we can broadly say that decolonisation "is a way of thinking about the world which takes colonialism, empire and racism as its empirical and discursive objects of study; it re-situates these phenomena as key shaping forces of the contemporary world, in a context where their role has been systematically effaced from view". (Bhambra, Gebriel & Niscancioglu 2018: 2). This speaks to a growing body of decolonial literature that focuses on coloniality and the marginalization of knowledge that originates outside of the Western world. Coloniality in this context can be defined as "long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that transcend colonialism to be constituted in culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production" (Ndlovu Gatsheni 2013: 30). These understandings rely on the fact that, despite colonization and empire being central to the organizing frameworks and categories in European social thought and broader society, there is relatively little attention given to exploring the history and ramifications of this reality.

Given that the demographics and social landscapes in Europe itself are increasingly expanding and blurring, including third and fourth generation migrants, persons with dual-nationality and heritage, and nations of former colonies, conversations about identity, coloniality, and inclusivity are increasingly being pushed forward from within Europe itself. As such, working against coloniality and its reproduction, decolonial calls have targeted university curricula, calling attention to the different ways curriculum transformation often overlooks marginalized histories or knowledge systems (Ramrathan 2016). Contemporary discussions around decoloniality provoke questions of how colonialism configures our contemporary world (Bhambra & Holmwood, 2021). Equally characteristic of this growing body of thought is an emphasis on the situatedness of knowledge, and the refutation of the idea that knowledge is objective, truthful, and uninfluenced by identity and geo-political configurations.

The reaction to this strand of decolonial thought has been mixed. Although there has been space made for conversation around imperial legacy in curriculum, whiteness, Eurocentrism and power in the politics of knowledge production, there has been little

systemic change in and across curricula in European universities. This has led some scholars to refer to the "buzzwordification" of the decolonial movement in the academy and the efforts made to address it – labelling the movement as one that pays lip service to decolonial rhetoric and thought but rarely sees or perhaps more importantly, funds, concrete change. These accusations of 'buzzwordification' have also been pushed forward by critics of the movement itself, who view many of the changes advocated by the movement as incompatible with the 'integrity' of a higher education institution (Ndlovu Gatsheni 2013).

Considering the backlash, the subject of approach, method, and effect is often called into question. Many have pointed to the 'extreme' and often nonsubversive approaches taken by the calls to decolonise the university and curriculum, particularly those that have focused on inserting and removing perspectives and authors from existing fields of study in a bid to make them more inclusive, with particular emphasis on those voices that have been historically excluded from and marginalized in the academy. Campaigns such as the 'Rhodes Must Fall' movement in South Africa and Oxford University, alongside the 'Decolonise my Curriculum' campaign in UK universities, have often come under scrutiny for this reason. For some, these movements are taken as pressuring university staff to adapt, and in rare cases scrap, their reading material. While there is a conversation to be had on the diversification and selection of reading material, there is also a need for such change and reform to be productive, thoughtful, and critically substantiated. Decolonial movements in the academy today will not receive the support needed for meaningful change if there is ubiquitous disagreement and lack of consensus as to how to implement subversive and fruitful reform.

Interestingly, an emergent group of contemporary decolonial thinkers have approached the challenge of decolonisation in the academy from a different angle. Thinkers such as Gurminder Bhambra (2021;2017;2007), Sabelo Ndlovu Gathesheni (2013), and John Holmwood (2011) approach decolonisation not by advocating for the inclusion or addition of Othered knowledge into curricula and theory, but rather aim to situate and rethink the construction of these fields on the basis that the grand social theories of the 19th and 20th century largely excluded coloniality and imperialism in their frameworks (Holmwood 2011). Social theorists such as Locke and Hobbes, despite rising to prominence at a time where imperial conquest was rampant amongst European Powers, failed to integrate or consider colonialism effectively in their social theorization (Bhambra and Holmwood, 2021). Recognizing this, thinkers such as Gurminder Bhambra have been pivotal in highlighting that the cornerstones of modern social theory have overlooked and not effectively grappled with concepts such as empire, conquest, and colonization, which were central to 19th and 20th century social thought.

The absence of systematic treatment of European colonialism and empire in the development of social theory impacts how we view and frame social issues in contemporary societies, and how we teach these issues. Anti-colonial movements, revolutions, and struggles are not theorized within broader theory around democracy, modernization, and citizenship. They are rather seen as the political entanglements of nation states rather than defining their societies and social processes (Bhambra 2021). As such, this call to decolonise sociology and modern social theory requires a decolonisation of categories and concepts rather than a wholistic critique or dismissal of the canon itself – 'the issue now is not simply to add colonialism to sociology's repertoire of topics, but to show how that repertoire has been formed with the absence of its consideration and must be subsequently reformed' (Bhambra and Holmwood 2021). This approach to decolonisation does not entail relativistic claims but situated social though in its historical roots. In this construction, European thought, modernity, and enlightenment was shaped and influenced by European Colonialism and empire in profound and explicit ways that cannot remain overlooked.

This is neither novel nor alien to European Studies. For years, ES curricula treated Europe as an imagined construct – an imagined community (Anderson 2006) – that is observer-relative, changes over time, and means different things to different people (Delanty 2019). It is, as a subject matter, historically formed and situated. It follows that when the basis of this imagined community neglects or undermines the immense impact of European colonialism, our understanding and our interpretation is, arguably, lacking. This does not mean that all we know about Europe is wrong nor that the current body of knowledge in European Studies ought to be discarded. It means that we – as practitioners, researchers, students – need to open our horizons to different interpretations of Europe, and acknowledge how the imperial legacy has left its mark on the thoughts, theories, cultures, societies, and ideas that are at the centre of our field (see also wa Thiong'o 1986; Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012; de Sousa Santos 2017).Decolonising European Studies necessitates a general reflection on what we know, why we know it, and what we are missing. In short, in order to learn about Europe, we first must engage in a process of unlearning.

STATUS QUO: WHAT DO EUROPEAN STUDIES CURRICULA LOOK LIKE?

The objective of this article is to provide theoretical and practical guidance for the decolonisation of European Studies curricula. Let us start from the basics. What do ES curricula look like? Which modules or themes can we identify across European Studies programmes in Europe? To answer these questions, we conducted a brief and non-exhaustive stock-taking exercise of modules offered in European Studies programmes in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany.[1] The focus was undergraduate programmes (BA and BSc) offered by research-oriented institutions. Table 1 below provides a non-exhaustive overview of the general modules taught, as well as an overview of the core themes that are addressed in the courses. These were deduced through a review of the websites dedicated to the courses or curriculum of each programme, and a review of available reading lists.[2] As is shown in the overview, ES curricula are structured around general modules focused on several aspects of the interdisciplinary field of European Studies, but mainly on European History, International Relations, European Union Studies, Politics, and Law.

Table 1: Overview of European Studies modules

General Modules	Addressed Themes
Cultural Studies	Foreign languages Area Studies Cultures of Europe
Economics	Micro/Macro-economics European markets Fundamental principles of economics
EU Studies	EU politics and institutions EU policy domains EU governance and administration
European History	History and European identity History of European integration History of European political thought
International Relations	Globalization and development International Relations theory
Legal Studies	EU Law (substantive and procedural) Legal philosophy
Politics	European Political philosophy European Political theory Fundamentals of political science

These modules address complex and interdisciplinary questions about Europe as an imagined community and European Studies as a field. On average, ES curricula begin with

an overarching question about what Europe is and what it means to be European, then gradually building on the idea of the European community as it is shaped by its diversity, by wars, and by integration. As educators in this field, we often ask questions about how the long history of Europe has shaped it as a community, how political movements have defined the way we understand European societies, and how the Europe of now, either as a Union or a community of states, exists and acts in a global context.

ES curricula put particular emphasis (to varying degrees) on teaching the 'basics' of responsible research practices and research methods in European Studies. Given the intrinsic interdisciplinarity of the field, methods education in ES curricula borrows from the 'toolboxes' of several disciplines – ranging from historical methods to political science quantitative methods – that equip students with the necessary techniques to gather and analyze data (Jackson 2011). Still, at the core of research skills training, we can find some common methodological assumptions about the making of solid scientific research – i.e., assumptions that have to do with "the logics, structure and procedure of scientific enquiry" (Sartori 1970: 1033). These typically have to do with what 'reliable sources' are and how the student-researcher can identify them, with how to formulate strong and feasible research questions that reflect analytical problems and steer away from normative ones, and how to collect data in an objective and systematic manner.

This overview shows us that, with the exception of a few modules dedicated to Europe's colonial legacy (usually integrated within modules on Globalisation and Development), the history and effect of colonialism and decolonisation is primarily addressed in the margins as the odd assignment in courses about European history or to provide context in discussions about International Relations. This is likely due to the hidden assumptions, forgotten voices, and socio-political practices that, whether we like it or not, have shaped how we understand Europe, and ultimately how we teach it.

UNLEARNING EUROPE: DECOLONISING EUROPEAN STUDIES CURRICULA

As argued previously, the process of decolonising the curriculum requires two interconnected steps: unlearning and relearning, so, how can we refocus the field of European Studies, and especially European studies curricula, so that we acknowledge Europe's colonial past and its impacts on current practices within the field? We find that the current configurations of European Studies curricula – broadly speaking – pose two separate challenges for decolonisation efforts. One challenge pertains to the content of the curricula, in terms of the subjects that are addressed or whose voices are represented in the syllabi. The other challenge pertains to methodological conventions in European Studies research training practices. Let us examine these in turn.

As we presented in the previous section, the content of most ES curricula is structured on the basis of modules of European history, European political theory and philosophy, international relations, and European Union studies – like, European law, EU politics, or EU policy domains. We recognize that, whilst curricula are not set in stone and the content of such does change over time often to accommodate new approaches to studying Europe – e.g. from a decolonial perspective. Still, our review revealed an absence of non-Western scholarship and particularly scholarship by scholars of colour in curricula and highlighted the ingrained Eurocentric character of ES.

Knowledge, and knowledge production, are not unbiased and "while knowledge can never be total, the selections we make have consequences for its ordering" (Bhambra 2017: 28). For ES curricula, this means that the decisions we make when designing curricula have a real impact on how we and our student-audiences understand and absorb. There are two components to this. The first relates to the diversity of the voices that we choose to include (or exclude) from our reading lists and our curricula. The overall monocultural canon of ES curricula, and European education, has been put under scrutiny through activist

campaigns such as 'Rhodes Must Fall' or 'Decolonize my Curriculum' that advocate for the inclusion of voices of colour and perspectives of marginalized communities in the curricula. However, adding new materials without addressing why these voices are necessary without framing the discussion in a larger context will not do much.

This brings us to the second component: the critical and intentional contextualization of marginalized and dominant voices. In short, teaching our students to recognize and acknowledge the impact of the European imperial legacy – i.e., by learning to contextualize their readings materials and their respective authors in social and geo-political contexts – only makes for a deeper understanding of the respective materials and the subject-matter. In this way, we learn to identify whose voices are represented, understand where those voices are coming from, and notice who is left out of the discussion. This is an exercise that is currently practised in ES curricula to a certain degree; however, this practice is, primarily, reserved for topics such as East and West European histories or other matters of political controversy that occur on 'European ground' – e.g., in discussions regarding East-West European relations. What about controversies that take place outside the continent? Or, what about topics that we do not consider as political controversies? We take topics such as modernity or the Enlightenment at face value, and while we may consider different analyses of the concepts at hand, we rarely position them in the imperial context in which they emerged. Still, it is sometimes the case that ES curricula, for instance modules relating to European history may undermine ideas of European exceptionalism and may not offer a critical approach to the history of European thought or European integration from a perspective of power and oppression.

The second challenge we face relates to methodological conventions about what it means to conduct solid research in European Studies. Be it as researchers or educators, we engage with the scientific method when conducting research. We make educated observations, carefully formulate research questions and hypotheses, consult the literature, systematically gather data and critically analyze it. We teach our students to do the same. In this way, by presenting research as a 'clean-cut' scientific process, we create the common understanding that knowledge acquisition is objective and somehow exempt from biases and assumptions. We claim the universal validity and universal applicability of the scientific method as the only (or at least the superior) manner of acquiring and producing knowledge. Is that the case? We argue for the contrary. Knowledge acquisition, like knowledge itself, is not devoid of politics. Presenting research practices as implicitly or explicitly universal, truthful, and innocent, we make normative decisions about what information and sources can be considered reliable and valid, and which voices can be justifiably excluded from the discussion in the name of the scientific method.

Still, critically evaluating one's sources of information and identifying the underlying assumptions at play is a major component of the first steps of research training that undergraduate ES students receive. They learn how to position themselves as researchers, how to identify their prior knowledge and assumptions, and how to consult different perspectives in order to gain a clear and comprehensive insight into their respective research problems. However, we only seldom extend this exercise to the identification and acknowledgement of the student-researcher's biases stemming from their own social and political environments. By recognizing that knowledge production is shaped by the researcher's own social and political positions and social and political experiences – for instance in the context of their relationship to positions of power and oppression (Naples 2003: 197-198), we move away from the assumption that knowledge production can adhere to European ideals of rationality and objectivity, and most importantly that we as researchers can detach ourselves from the process of knowledge production.

INTERMEZZO: BUT, IT'S STILL *EUROPEAN* STUDIES!

In both academic and activist spaces, discussions regarding decolonisation in the context of European Studies as a field, or Europe as a subject-matter , often trigger a pressing and persistent question that challenges the need for decolonisation: 'But, it's still *European Studies!*'. While efforts at the decolonisation of European Studies – be it regarding our curricula, our research practices, or our field of study – do not entail the compromise of Europe as a subject-matter, these questions are valid and ought to be addressed.

European Studies do, indeed, have Europe as their central focus. Engaging with decolonisation and taking a critical stance against the legacy of the European empire on our perception of Europe does not mean that we erase Europe as a focus. Quite the contrary, it means that we focus on Europe in a deeper, more meaningful, and more comprehensive way. It simply means that we acknowledge that Europe is not a neutral object of study; it is imagined, it is constructed, and it is defined by a myriad of things – and the European imperial legacy is part of that. The point here is that one cannot simply detach Europe from its colonial past nor the impact that this past has on our current ideas about Europe.

While indeed we do run the risk of "compromising" our current understanding of what Europe is and how European Studies operates as a field, we argue that this is a risk worth taking for the development of ES as a whole. As mentioned above, reckoning with difficult histories and violent pasts is an intrinsic part of European Studies, because it is an intrinsic part of Europe. Engaging with decolonisation in the field of ES – and especially in curricula – only enriches our understanding; not doing so would be a disservice to the discipline and our students.

Having said that, we also recognize that decolonising ES curricula, just like any 'paradigm shift', can be messy and difficult. It makes us take a deep look into our work and our practices, and while enriching, it can also be uncomfortable and challenging. Like any other field stemming from the humanities and social sciences, context matters. European Studies are taught under different names, under different disciplines, different programmes, and are perceived differently in different countries. This is something to certainly take into account in these discussions, but it should not, however, deter us from engaging with a critical reflection of our curricula.

RELEARNING EUROPE: PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Having covered some main reasons why decolonial approaches in European Studies are important, this section highlights practical approaches to implementing decolonial methodologies in European Studies curricula and considers approaches that educational practitioners can explore. The aim here is to critically reflect on how the living legacy of coloniality has structured knowledge production within our curricula and how, in turn, this has contributed to structural disadvantages in both students and staff experience (SOAS, 2018).

These methodological reflections do not offer case-in-point solutions to complex problems. Educational practitioners should pay close attention to what may be relevant and useful for them in their context. Additionally, it may be helpful to ask why something is not useful for your context or why exactly you feel it would not work. As mentioned earlier contemporary approaches towards decolonising the academy have assisted in understanding the different ways decolonial strategies can help build a more honest picture of European thought. Against this background, we identify three broad points of attention relating to positionality, responsiveness, and storytelling. We explore these in turn.

Positionality

Teaching positionality in education encourages one to critically locate the geo-political context of who and what they teach. Positionality is essential in overcoming an 'objective'

and monocultural approach to knowledge. In her article on Confronting the Colonial Library, Sally Matthews (2018) identifies a key question in her navigation of decolonial approaches in the classroom, asking herself 'what is the extent to which a scholar's race or geographic origin matters when thinking about how to challenge the colonial library?'. To answer this, Matthews quotes Sarah Harding, saying that 'we must surely be able to decide the validity of a knowledge claim apart from who speaks it, even while recognizing that "it does make a difference who says what and when' (Matthews 2018: 52). The relationship between knowledge and identity and whether knowledge can have an identity, are concerns that reflect the key questions many Western societies are grappling with today.

Eurocentrism, a monocultural approach to knowledge, assumes a universal validity and reproduces an 'abstract vantage point of the knowing subject' (Izcaza and Vazques 2018: 114). Putting positionality into practice enables us, even while teaching the canon, to uncover the geo-epistemology of the subject, knowledge, and thinker we are teaching instead of assuming a position of universality. In their chapter of 'Decolonizing the University' Rosalba Icaza and Rolando Vázquez discuss a study they conducted at the university of Amsterdam in 2018, where they found that undergraduate students felt more included in their learning when exposed to knowledge practices in class that revealed their 'geo-historical position'. Engagement with positionality reveals 'the intersectional conditions of knowledge production and that shows unequivocally how the axes of differentiation along race, class and gender have been essential for establishing the canon and, concurrently, how the canon has been essential to reproduce these axes of discrimination' (Izcaza and Vazques 2018: 119).

What could this look like in practice? Some Universities such as SOAS, University of London have, in their efforts to decolonise their curriculum, integrated *disciplinary framing* in their courses to address issues of positionality (SOAS 2018). Part of this disciplinary framing at the start of courses has involved posing a series of questions that, 'contextualize the emergence of the discipline in the histories of colonialism and empire' and examine how their course has been 'saturated' by this context (SOAS 2018: 11). Questions involved in the 'disciplinary framing' of a course could include:

1. How have the methodological approaches used within this discipline affected who this subject has taken to be both objects and subjects of research and knowledge?
2. What voices are present in the course I am teaching, and how do these voices contribute to presenting or framing different entry-points into the disciplinary framing of the course?
3. 'How and why have the colonial context and authors discussing the colonial context been erased and/or ignored by the canon? And what effects has this erase had on the subsequent development of the discipline?' (SOAS 2018: 11).

Disciplinary framing in this way can assist educational practitioners in putting positionality into practice. As mentioned above, this exercise could involve integrating reading material that highlights aspects of an author's life and presents critical critiques that open up an arena for students to think about and discuss why decolonial pathways may be relevant to their own subject study.

For instance, John Holmwood (2020) explains that in the study of Political Philosophy and Political Science thinkers such as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes developed their work at a time where European Imperialism and Colonial conquest was at its height and failed to critically reflect on empire and colonization in relation to European society in their work. The intentional highlighting of the authors' background can equip students with a better understanding of where respective arguments stem from, how they are created, and what

is or is not considered. This shifts away from a 'colour-blind' perception of academic texts to recognize and account for their normative nature. Exposing students to this context and its implications in their education does not 'divert' from the core tenets of a discipline but rather introduces students to the different ways these subjects are still being discussed contemporarily. In highlighting an author's positionality, we are thus more able to expose how a thinker's biases may have developed and may be reflected in their work. For educational practitioners looking to expose students to a more diverse readership, these footnotes of information also encourage students to place readers and thinkers in conversation with one another, not only on the basis of commonality and disagreement but also based on what has been neglected and silenced.

Responsiveness

Practices of teaching and learning grounded in relational approaches, or democratic forms of teaching, can contribute to more decolonised forms of learning. This approach comes from acknowledging the makeup of your classroom interacts with the knowledge you are teaching and relaying in that space. For many practitioners, this essentially boils down to recognizing that teaching is also the practice of meaning-making and that the content of the canon will undeniably create and relay multiple meanings for different people. A relational approach is not simply a participatory approach but rather one in which the diverse backgrounds and lived experiences in the classroom can be rendered valuable in the learning process. This is all the more relevant as our classrooms become increasingly international and as boundaries around access to education are, albeit slowly, reduced.

Engaging with students' experiences, opinions, and lived realities assists us in teaching students how to critically relate to material in constructive ways. For example, in the course 'The Idea of Africa', taught at Maastricht University in 2019, students were tasked with studying Congolese philosopher Valentin Yves Mudimbe's concept of the 'Colonial Library'. Students were asked to first discuss for ten minutes their engagement with the 'idea' of the continent and how their understanding of Africa is framed and constructed in their relative countries and/or general experiences. After students had finished this reflective exercise, we found that engaging these relevant experiences opened up pathways for students to relate more to the theoretical concepts placed in front of them in the tutorial and also provoked a critical dialogue on the relevance of these ideas to contemporary society and the different people who operate in it. Integrating individual experience and background into class in a non-assuming and respectful way can show students and teachers how diverse experiences shape knowledge claims, and how disseminated knowledge will, in turn, have different meanings for people in the classroom. In this way, using relational teaching practices means that students' positionality is not suppressed, but, on the contrary, becomes a tool for enriching learning experiences whilst engaging in and preparing students for the contemporary conversations beyond academia.

Often, using and engaging lived experience in university settings is thought to take away from the subject material itself and give too much room for subjectivity. People have commented that in the calls to decolonise curriculum there is too much of an emphasis on the student's feelings in relation to the text or, indeed, the figure taught. One of the most common examples is for students to cite the prolific racism of sociological, literary or philosophical figures and use this as a basis for not studying the mandatory reading material. Using relational approaches, one could address and be open about the existing critiques of these sociological thinkers and offer space for students to address these elements constructively. Relational approaches to teaching encourage practitioners to develop an understanding and sympathy of where students may be speaking from and the experiences that have led them to express caution and skepticism of certain approaches, thinkers, or discussions in a classroom. Dismissing this skepticism does little to encourage students to learn the course material and in effect explore this skepticism and caution critically. Similarly, simply providing materials that engage with 'tough topics' without

training necessary critical thinking and analytical skills defeats the purpose of such exercises.

In 2019, a decolonial workshop for teaching and support staff at Maastricht University in The Netherlands focused on responsive teaching, generated many fruitful inter-faculty discussions on possible 'decolonial pathways'. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences and practices in the international classroom. One experience repeatedly raised in the workshop by participants was how to handle uncomfortable situations in class that might arise from student discussions about decoloniality, race, and colonial legacy. This discomfort is not unfounded and is widely experienced by those attempting to integrate these discussions into their class environments. However, it is important to remember that teachers are also tasked with guiding and intervening in difficult conversations on colonial legacy, race, and decoloniality – all issues that might be either new or somewhat unfamiliar or uncomfortable to them too. In the workshop, participant experiences of discomfort and uncertainty were highlighted as a point of mutual learning between course coordinators, instructors, and students. Giving examples from their own classroom environments, student exchange and interaction were encouraged whilst also setting certain ground rules before said conversations. These included:

1. Relaying to students in both the course manual and again in person that this course may cover difficult topics that are the subject of much debate today but that in discussing these subjects, our classroom will function as a space where racism, homophobia, and sexism are not tolerated, in line with broader university policies on classroom interactions and acceptable conduct.
2. Offer replacement words at the beginning of each task that students can use to comfortably address and discuss historical texts that include racial and homophobic slurs without reproducing them.
3. Explain that while debate and exchange of opinion are encouraged, we will avoid debating the validity of individual experiences of oppression, and in doing so, also try to keep a close eye on whether particular students are being used as ambassadors of their racial, religious, class, gendered, and sexual identities in conversation.

The workshop provided space for participants to practise working through examples of student scenarios that had occurred at the university and provided room for the exchange of suggestions rooted in staff-student experiences. As such, while responsiveness within the classroom can be a great tool in decolonising ES curriculum and putting that in practice within the classroom, guiding a responsive environment will also take time and practise. There is no fixed image of a 'decolonised classroom'. Instead, staff need to explore, reflect on, and test out different practices that suit your classroom environment and material. In a class on history of European empires, challenging topics are more likely to arise than in classes on the history of European integration, which key texts tend to consider 'free' of colonialism. However, by intentionally bringing attention to the complex issues relating to the legacy of the empire on the EU, one can start chipping away at the assumption that European empires no longer influence contemporary Europe and contemporary European Studies.

'Other Others', Epistemologies of Thought, and Exploration

Being open to exploring and researching alternative methodologies and systems of thought is integral to establishing decolonial pathways. Given the multiplicity of decolonial approaches and aims that exist, researchers and educational practitioners are encouraged to dedicate time to situating their own standpoints within decolonial literature, and especially decolonial literature relevant to their field. Oftentimes, people make a point to say they disagree with decolonial rhetoric and action, whilst not having explored the

multitude of standpoints that exist with decolonial literature. Openness is also the willingness from educational practitioners to research and discover alternative methodologies and voices located in knowledge systems that are typically underrepresented in the Western academy.

Recognizing this, it is imperative to avoid tokenistic forms of integrating voices into reading material. Representation is important, but voices must still be included in meaningful, critical, and intentional ways. There is no singular 'indigenous', 'Black', or 'gendered' voice, and exploring the multiplicity of voices is integral to creating a curriculum where reading material generates critical and thoughtful dialogue. Postcolonial thinker Gaurav Desai uses the concept of 'other others' to highlight those voices that are often overlooked in the attempt to redress the colonial archive. According to Desai, there are 'Others' in the canon but also 'Other Others'. The most obvious, Desai explains, is the intersectional marginalization of African women in the colonial library by European and African writers (Desai 2001). For educational practitioners hoping to amplify the voices of 'other others' in European society and history within their curriculum, storytelling offers an interesting and accessible approach. Students can relate these stories to other core readers in interesting and pluralistic ways. In doing so they are encouraged to notice how such narratives may be omitted from broader accounts of history, sociology, or global politics.

By storytelling, we mean the "the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights" (Serrat 2008: 14). Building narratives and placing stories in conversation can create both depth and relatability to a subject that many students and practitioners often miss in their experience of higher education and research. Therefore, through storytelling, we may draw from peoples' lived realities and sometimes even works of fiction, which can then challenge and provoke a different strain of thought within a broader subject. Integrating storytelling as a decolonial strategy can be met with reserve as it is seen as going against the grain of 'objectivity' and 'concrete learning'. Within higher education, peer-reviewed journals, articles, and concrete textbooks are considered key sources of knowledge. However, as educational practitioners, there is also a wide variety of work outside this that can contribute a lot of value to the subject and discourse you present within your course, class or research.

For example, teaching what some consider more delicate topics, storytelling can contribute important and often overlooked dimensions to grander narratives. Consider for example Saidiya Hartman's work on the histories of the enslaved and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Hartman's work uses fiction alongside historical documentation and archival research to re-create narratives that give us insights into lived realities often excluded from historical accounts. This is a process she terms 'critical fabulation'. Hartman explains that 'as a writer committed to telling stories, I have endeavored to represent the lives of the nameless and the forgotten, to reckon with loss, and to respect the limits of what cannot be known' (Hartman 2008:3). While Hartman's stories are not presented as the central texts on the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the experiences of enslaved Africans, her work opens a new, intimate, and more 'humane' dimension to her readership. These are important as much literature about the enslaved, colonialism, and the trans-Atlantic slave trade can often focus too heavily on figures and statistical accounts. Students exposed to these stories, are offered new angles to critically discuss the topic of the transatlantic slave trade in West Africa. Integrating storytelling, fiction, and narrative can thus assist teachers in uncovering different 'actors' in history and aids with recuperating the narratives of what Postcolonial thinker Gurav Desai (2001) calls 'other others'.

CONCLUSIONS

In the very last paragraph of her book, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), bell hooks states:

> The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility, we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (hooks 1994: 207)

In this reflective article, we base our argument on the premise that the university, in its traditional role as an institution for the pursuit of knowledge and truth – whatever those might mean, is an institution of freedom. By critically assessing and rethinking our ways of knowing, deconstructing and reconstructing our ways of acquiring knowledge, and examining how we teach and what we teach, we engage in what bell hooks refers to as a 'necessary revolution' (hooks 1994: 29-30).

European imperial legacy, as any other act of oppression, is created, re-created, and taught at both a cultural and individual level through education (Noël Smith 2014: 80). When faced with the legacy, history, and the damage of colonialism, one may get the feeling that dismantling colonial systems of power feels like throwing a pebble at a brick wall in the hopes to dismantle it. People may even think such a task is futile. It is important to re-emphasize here that decolonisation is a process rather than a fixed location or a tangible end-objective such as a dismantled barrier. This is to say that there is no clear step-by-step guide to achieving a curriculum or program that is fully 'decolonised', especially as the term decolonisation itself is not a fixed concept and will continue to change. Rather, this article has demonstrated why decolonial approaches are incumbent to educational reform, particularly in fields that center on European thought and European social history. In presenting this article we have endeavored to point others in directions that might help them in their own decolonial process - exposing them to literature, research, and resources that can assist to unlearn and relearn Europe.

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ENDNOTES

[1] This exercise was carried out on the basis of publicly available information provided on the websites of each undergraduate ES undergraduate programme offered in Europe. The programmes were found through the website www.bachelorsportal.com.
[2] The list is based on the BA European Studies curricula offered by the following universities on February 2022: University of Amsterdam, Maastricht University, University of Groningen, Europa-Universität Flensburg, Sciences Po, University College London, University of Southern Denmark, University of Piraeus and University of Essex.

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