Some Thoughts on Decolonizing the Business School Curriculum

1. It should be apparent from the two meetings of our taskforce and the two ETHOS workshops that decolonizing the business school is a complex, difficult and perhaps an impossible task, particularly if it is going to be appropriated by discourses of diversity and inclusion, which seems almost inevitable.

2. Decolonizing the business school begins with a critique of the political economy of capitalism because colonialism was and is integral to capitalism.

3. A first step would be to identify colonial histories that inform our curriculum and our pedagogical practices.

4. University College London Changemakers describe a colonial curriculum as 'characterised by its unrepresentative, inaccessible, and privileged nature. **Unrepresentative,** because it selectively constructs teachings which exclude certain, oftentimes, crucial narratives. **Inaccessible,** because it consequently prevents many of its recipients from identifying with the narratives construed, whilst appealing to a historically favoured demographic. **Privileged,** because it ensures the continued participation, comfort and flourish of this select group of people, in both an academic and a wider societal context. Sadly, and unacceptably, this all occurs at the detriment of adverse range of marginalized voices[1]'.

Questions: In what ways is our current curriculum unrepresentative, inaccessible and/or privileged? How do we teach race, constructed through histories of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, in organization theory[2] [3]? What exclusions are apparent when we teach theories of leadership in organizational behavior[4]? In what ways are theories of organization gendered and racialized?[5] How are histories of slavery intertwined with histories of capitalism[6]? In what ways are modern 'scientific' management and accounting practices of labor productivity byproducts of bondage and slavery[7] [8]? What colonial discourses inform our understanding of business ethics, stakeholder theory and corporate social responsibility[9]? Whose voices are excluded and ways of knowing and being

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[1] https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/decolonisation-curriculum-conversation

[2] Nkomo, S. (1992). The emperor has no clothes: Rewriting 'Race in Organizations'. *Academy of Management Review*, 17 (3): 487-513.

[3] Ray, V. (2019). A theory of racialized organizations. *American Sociological Review*, 84 (1): 26–53.

[4] Nkomo SM (2011). A postcolonial and anti-colonial reading of 'African' leadership and management in organization studies: tensions, contradictions and possibilities. *Organization*, 18(3):365-386.

[5] Mastracci, S., & Arreola, V. (2016). Gendered organizations: How human resource management practices produce and reproduce Administrative Man. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 38: 137-149.

[6] Williams, E. (1944/1994). *Capitalism and slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North California Press.

[7] Rosenthal C. (2018). *Accounting for slavery: Masters and management*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[8] Cooke, B. (2003). The denial of slavery in management studies. *Journal of Management Studies,* 40(8): 1895-1918.

[9] Banerjee, S.B. (2000). Whose land is it anyway? National interest, indigenous stakeholders and colonial discourses: The case of the Jabiluka uranium mine. *Organization & Environment,* 13(1), 3-38.

5. According to the Keele Manifesto for Decolonizing the Curriculum: 'Decolonization involves identifying colonial systems, structures and relationships, and working to challenge those systems. It is not 'integration' or simply the token inclusion of the intellectual achievements of non-white cultures. **Rather, it involves a paradigm shift from a culture of exclusion and denial to the making of space for other political philosophies and knowledge systems.** It's a culture shift to think more widely about why common knowledge is what it is, and in so doing adjusting cultural perceptions and power relations in real and significant ways[12]'.

6. A decolonized curriculum goes beyond being 'inclusive' or 'diverse' and calls for a more radical questioning of the canon itself and the cultural authority that it is imbued with[13]. **The questioning of the moral authority of the canon itself is at the heart of the difference.**

7. Decolonizing the curriculum is a political project. **An inclusive or diverse curriculum excludes politics and power from the discussion thus reinforcing the authority of the dominant Western canon.** Instead, 'the aim of a decolonized curriculum, unlike an inclusive one, is about much more than the attainment of individual students at any one University, as important as that is. Instead, and ultimately it is about transforming society, about breaking down structural inequalities and institutional racism and as centres of knowledge production, higher education should be leading the way on this'[14].

8. At best business schools who say they want to decolonize can try and diversify their curriculum by including voices of black and people of color.

9. Diversity is not decolonization. **Equality, diversity and inclusion policies that are being developed at a rapid pace across universities can seriously undermine and appropriate the decolonization process.** As Angela Davis said 'diversity is the difference that makes no difference. Diversity is the change that brings about no change'.[15] There is also a considerable body of research that demonstrates why

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[10] Banerjee, S.B, (2003). Who sustains whose development? Sustainable development and the reinvention of nature. *Organization Studies,* 24 (1): 143-180.

[11] Adamson M, Kelan E, Lewis P, Śliwa M, Rumens N. (2020) Introduction: Critically interrogating inclusion in organisations. *Organization*. doi:10.1177/1350508420973307

[12] https://www.keele.ac.uk/equalitydiversity/equalityframeworksandactivities/equalityawardsandreports/equalityawards/raceequalitycharter/keeledecolonisingthecurriculumnetwork/#keele-manifesto-for-decolonising-the-curriculum

[13] Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Durham: Duke University Press.

[14] https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/decolonisation-curriculum-conversation

[15] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/nov/08/usa.gender

diversity programs fail [16] [17] [18] [19] [20]. The liberal democratic project of diversity disavows its own position as a 'neutral' site from which alone diversity can be proclaimed. It is from this neutral site that diversity is able to regulate difference. Diversity creates an abstract equality, whereas decolonization is the project of creating a radical equality, 'an equality that frees difference from the straitjacket of diversity'[21]. Anti-racism cannot be framed as a diversity project without understanding the colonial structures of racial injustice that created the slave trade.

10. Once decolonization is coopted by diversity it will be reconstituted, depoliticized, packaged, sanitized and sold as a brand that university leaders hope can command a premium in student fees. Pictures of black and brown students in glossy university marketing brochures hide the grim realities of racism and racial discrimination that students and staff of color experience on a daily basis at UK universities.

11. A decolonized business school curriculum is not about assimilating new material from non-Western locations into existing theories. For instance, incorporating a case study of a call center in Bangalore, India in a module on international human resource management maybe an example of diversifying but not decolonizing the curriculum if it is presented merely as an illustration of outsourcing without a nuanced analysis of its linguistic neo-colonialism assumptions and identity regulation practices[22] [23]. **Thus, genuine engagement with decolonizing the business school curriculum requires linking structures of colonialism to the curriculum.**

12. Decolonizing the curriculum means understanding and challenging the ways in which or world is shaped by colonialism. It involves recognizing there are multiple world views and multiple ways of knowing, for example Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing[24] [25] .

[16] https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2019/06/01/harvard-business-school-diversity-remains-elusive/bpyxP4cE1iCQJdLbHQEaQI/story.html

[17] Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Durham: Duke University Press.

[18] Liu, H. (2017) Undoing Whiteness: The Dao of Anti-racist Diversity Practice. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 24: 457– 471.

[19] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/08/diversity-consultants-racism-seminars-corporate-america

[20] https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail

[21] Siddiqui, H.O. (2020). https://thewire.in/society/ambedkar-gandhi-subcontinental-philosophy

[22] Boussebaa, M., Sinha, S., & Gabriel, Y. (2014). Englishization in offshore call centers: A postcolonial perspective. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 45(9): 1152-1169.

[23] Boussebaa, M., & Brown, A. D. (2016). Englishization, identity regulation and imperialism. *Organization Studies*, 38(1): 7-29.

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[25] Banerjee, S.B. & Arjaliès, D.L. (2021). Celebrating the end of Enlightenment: Organization theory in the age of the Anthropocene and Gaia (and why neither is the solution to our ecological crisis). *Organization Theory,* 2 (4): doi:10.1177/26317877211036714.

Questions: Where are the non-Western voices in management and organization knowledge[26]? What roles do UK business schools play in reinforcing colonial attitudes in the so-called postcolonial era[27][28]? What neo-colonial formations underlie processes of globalization and internationalization[29][30]? What are the neo-colonial assumptions that are apparent in our international business textbooks[31]; international business management studies[32][33][34][35]; studies of multinational corporations[36][37][38]; accounting and reporting practices[39]; entrepreneurship[40][41]; and corporate violence[42]?

13. Colonial structures and institutional racism continue to inform present day business-society relations. The structural consequences of colonialism needs to be taught in our classrooms in relation to present day problems like climate change, economies of natural resource extraction and dispossession. For example, a recent article in *The Guardian* describes how there has been a rise in human rights abuses among Indigenous peoples due to increasing land grabs that endanger forest communities

[26] Alcadipani, R., Khan, F.R., Gantman, E. & Nkomo, S. (2012). Southern voices in management and organization knowledge. *Organization*, 19, 131–43.

[27] Boussebaa, M. (2020). In the shadow of empire: Global Britain and the UK business school. *Organization,* 27(3): 483-493.

[28] Dar, S., Liu, H., Martinez, Dy A. & Brewis, D.N. (2020). The business school is racist: Act up! *Organization*. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1350508420928521

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[30] Banerjee, S.B. and Linstead, S. (2001). Globalization, multiculturalism and other fictions: Colonialism for the new millennium? *Organization*, 8 (4): 683-722.

[31] Fougère, M., & Moulettes, A. (2012). Disclaimers, dichotomies and disappearances in international business textbooks: A postcolonial deconstruction. *Management Learning*, 43(1), 5-24.

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[33] Faria, A., Ibarra-Colado, E. and Guedes, A. (2010). Internationalization of management, neoliberalism and the Latin America Challenge. *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, 6(2/3), 97–115.

[34] Westwood, R. (2006). International business and management studies as an Orientalist discourse: A postcolonial critique. *Critical Perspectives on International Business* 2(2): 91-113.

[35] Westwood, R. & Jack, G. (2007). Manifesto for a post-colonial international business and management studies: A provocation', *Critical Perspectives on International Business* 3(3): 246-65.

[36] Frenkel, M. (2008). The multinational corporation as a third space: Rethinking international management discourse on knowledge transfer through Homi Bhabha. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(4), 924-942.

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[38] Yousfi, H. (2013). Rethinking hybridity in postcolonial Contexts: What changes and what persists? The Tunisian case of Poulina's managers. *Organization Studies,* 35: 393-421.

[39] Dar, S. (2014) Hybrid Accountabilities: When Western and Non-Western accountabilities collide, *Human Relations*, 67(2): 131-151.

[40] Banerjee, S.B. & Tedmanson, D. (2010). Grass burning under our feet: Indigenous enterprise development in a political economy of whiteness. *Management Learning,* 41 (2): 147-165.

[41] Peredo A.M., McLean M. (2013). Indigenous development and the cultural captivity of entrepreneurship. *Business & Society*. 52(4):592-620.

[42] Varman, R., & Al-Amoudi, I. (2016). Accumulation through derealization: How corporate violence remains unchecked. *Human Relations*, 69(10), 1909–1935.

as governments and corporations expand mining and agriculture[43]. Colonial relations of power continue to underlie conflicts between Indigenous communities and mining corporations that are ongoing in countries with diverse colonial histories like Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, India, South Africa, and the United States among others[44]. Similarly, climate change discourses often obscure climate injustices and several proposed solutions to the climate crisis perpetuate a type of climate colonialism where people that have contributed the least to the climate problem are dying and suffering in disproportionate numbers[45]. Moreover environmental racism is rife in contemporary society as described in a recent *Guardian* investigation[46] [47].

Questions: In what ways can decolonial insights create more equitable approaches to the governance of natural resource extraction and the governance of climate change? What are the implications for a decolonial understanding of supply chain management, stakeholder theory , business ethics, CSR, competitive strategy, leadership, organizational change, consumer behavior, resource based view of the firm, valuation of nature, business ecosystems and other theories that inform our curriculum? What alternative models of enterprise based on economic cooperation can emerge from a decolonial imagination?

14. Addressing these questions will be confronting, uncomfortable, threatening, challenging, disturbing and requires learning and unlearning our own privileges as business school educators. Not everyone will be willing to put themselves through such a process – it is important to realize that the points discussed above are not meant to be prescriptive but offered in the spirit of critical reflection.

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[43] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/feb/18/indigenous-peoples-face-rise-in-rights-abuses-during-covid-pandemic-report-aoe

[44] https://ejatlas.org

[45] https://earth.org/eu-green-deal-perpetuates-climate-colonialism/

[46] https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/feb/11/environmental-racism-americas-dirty-divide

[47] https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/feb/11/centreville-illinois-flooding-sewage-overflow