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Decolonial education and geography: Beyond the 2017 Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers annual conference

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Abstract

This review is inspired by the recent resurgence of grass-roots movements aimed at the decolonisation of education. The departure point of the paper are the numerous, recent academic responses to campaigns such as Rhodes Must Fall, Why is My Curriculum White?, Why Isn't My Professor Black?, and #LiberateMyDegree. Following from there, the narrative is divided into two sections. The first part reviews theoretical approaches to decolonial education, especially those rooted in the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality paradigm. The second part analyses the ways in which geographers have applied these ideas to our discipline. The review pays particular attention to the 2017 Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers annual conference, curated under the "Decolonising geographical knowledges" theme. I argue that as geographers, we have to continue reflecting on the meaning of decolonial praxis, especially in relation to geographical education, beyond the recent conference. To these ends, the review concludes with seven specific questions for geographers to consider in the near future.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a worldwide resurgence of grassroots movements aimed at the decolonisation of education. Such initiatives are diverse and include (just to name a few) Rhodes Must Fall in South Africa, Rhodes Must Fall Oxford, Why is My Curriculum White?, Why Isn't My Professor Black?, #LiberateMyDegree, Silence Sam, and Leopold Must Fall (Bhambra, Gebrial, & Nişancıoğlu, 2018; Cupples & Grosfoguel, 2019; Rhodes Must Fall Oxford, 2018). These movements formulate concrete demands for deep, structural decolonisation and democratisation of contemporary universities. For example, the Rhodes Must Fall Oxford campaign is far more than a symbolic call to remove the statue of Cecil Rhodes from Oriel College. Beyond "tackling the plague of colonial iconography," the movement fights for a deep restructuring of "the Euro-centric curriculum" and an end to "underrepresentation and lack of welfare provision for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) amongst Oxford's academic stuff and students" (Rhodes Must Fall Oxford, 2019, online). Similarly, the #LiberateMyDegree campaign run by the National Union of Students in the United Kingdom demands liberation of higher education, where oppression is understood through a structural silencing of a variety of "liberation groups" including "women, working class, disabled, LGBT+, Black students and those with caring responsibilities" (NUSConnect, 2019, online). While these movements are diverse, they share a common goal of tackling contemporary structural, institutionalised, and intersectional forms of exclusion.

The movements, together with numerous intellectual dialogues happening between Indigenous[1] and BME scholars, inspire many important academic interventions on the topic of decolonial education. Within the English-speaking academy, such contributions include a large number of recently published edited volumes, for example *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education* (Smith, Tuck, & Yang, 2019), *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning* (de Jong, Icaza, & Rutazibwa, 2019), *Decolonial Pedagogy* (Wane & Todd, 2018), *Dismantling Race in Higher Education* (Arday & Mirza, 2019), *Unsettling Eurocentrism in the Westernized University* (Cupples & Grosfoguel, 2019), *Decolonising the University: The Challenge of Deep Cognitive Justice* (De Sousa Santos, 2017), and *Decolonising the University* (Bhambra et al., 2018). This review is an invitation for all geographers to further engage with these literatures. Given how we produce and disseminate knowledge, as well as our discipline's colonial heritage, all of us should get involved with those debates. I argue that as geographers, we have to keep reflecting on the meaning of decolonial praxis, especially in relation to geographical education. The paper is divided into two main parts. First, I discuss more theoretical literatures; drawing on insights from the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality research programme (hereafter MCD), I delineate strong links between decolonial theories and decolonial education. Second, I analyse how geographers have applied these ideas to our discipline, focusing especially on debates around the 2017 Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG) conference, curated under the "Decolonising geographical knowledges" theme.

2 | DISCLAIMERS

Before I begin, I must make three important disclaimers. The first is that efforts to decolonise learning and teaching are nothing new. While this review will focus on the recent resurgence of decolonial pedagogies in academic literatures in the Western world, it is essential to remember that Indigenous, First Nations, and Black Peoples have fought for their own pedagogical projects since the very beginning of colonial times. For example, in the Bolivian Andes, how Indigenous People have been fighting for the recognition of their ways of learning and teaching is documented in sources at least since the nineteenth century (Gotkowitz, 2011; Lopes Cardozo, 2011; Maldonado Rocha, 2017). Academic debates on decolonial education amongst Bolivian intellectuals are numerous and much more advanced to equivalent debates in the English-speaking world (Patzi, 1999; PROCEP, 1993; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010; Saavedra, 2007; Saavedra, 2014; Spedding Pallet, 2011; Tapia, 2014).

The second disclaimer is about my positionality. An important element of decolonial pedagogy of any kind is an openness about one's position within the global geography of epistemic power relations. I am a White, queer, male,

Polish PhD student studying at a Geography department at an English university. I was introduced to decolonial theories as an undergraduate student at the University of Edinburgh, where I took an optional module run by professor Julie Cupples. Learning about decolonial theories, especially the MCD, had a profound personal effect on me. I felt that I was introduced to a theory which accurately describes how I feel as an Eastern European queer person in an English-speaking academic environment. Since then, searching for possible raptures and openings, which have decolonial potential with respect to Westernised education systems, became my political commitment, both personally and professionally. As such, I am writing to you as someone who is not a decolonial scholar per se, but as someone who is middle-class, relatively privileged and ambiguously positioned with respect to global epistemic power relations, but committed to more ethical, reflexive, and loving learning and teaching.

The final disclaimer concerns the theoretical approach to the topic adopted. While I refer to a range of different postcolonial, decolonial, and anti-colonial theorists, my approach is grounded in the MCD. That is because a large amount of recent scholarship which focuses on decolonial education claims theoretical grounding in that research programme (although approaches coming from settler colonial contexts begin to emerge as clearly separate; see Smith et al., 2019). I am also particularly connected to the MCD because it is the framework most often used by my research partners in Bolivia. While there are significant differences and disagreements within and between different strands of postcolonial, decolonial, and anti-colonial thinking, these are beyond the scope of this brief review (for accounts of these differences, see Asher, 2013; Bhambra, 2014). In here, I see these approaches as parallel and focus on how geographers have taken debates about decoloniality up within the context of our discipline.

3 | DECOLONIAL THEORIES AND DECOLONIAL EDUCATION

3.1 | Modernity/coloniality/decoloniality

The underlying premise of decolonial scholarship is that despite the official end of colonial rule, we continue to live in a world underpinned by colonial situations. The latter are defined by Grosfoguel (2007, p. 220) as "cultural, political, sexual, spiritual, epistemic and economic oppression/exploitation of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racialized/ethnic groups with or without the existence of colonial administrations." In relation to colonial situations, Maldonado Torres (2007, p. 243) makes a clear distinction between coloniality and colonialism:

> *Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of people, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience.*

Maldonado-Torres hints at a close relation between coloniality and the modern experience, or modernity. One of the main arguments put forward by MCD scholars is that "modernity and coloniality are two sides of the same coin." The two are often referred to as modernity/coloniality (Mignolo, 2009, p. 42).

The MCD research programme is politically committed to decoloniality. For Mignolo and Walsh (2018, p. 4), the role of decoloniality is to open possibilities for "undo[ing], disobey[ing] and delink[ing]" from coloniality in order to "construct paths and praxis towards an otherwise of thinking, sensing, believing, doing and living." Decoloniality

> *is not a new paradigm or mode of critical thought, [but] a way, option, standpoint, analytic, project, practice, and praxis [based] not only [on] the purview of peoples who have lived the colonial difference but,*

more broadly, of all of us who struggle from and within modernity/coloniality's borders and cracks. (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 5)

"The ultimate decolonial horizon," or the "decolonial *for*" is the "end of modernity," which would also mean the end of coloniality and no further need for decoloniality (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; emphasis original). A world in which many worlds fit, to borrow from the Zapatistas, or the so-called pluriverse, as conceptualised by Escobar (2017). Decolonial education for a pluriversal world is inevitably linked to the politics of knowledge production in modern/colonial times, to which I turn next.

3.2 | The four genocides/epistemicides and the modern thinking subject

Based on a historical reading from a Latin American perspective, MCD scholars suggest that as a system, modernity/coloniality originates in the late fifteenth century. Recognising the formative role of the events of that century for the modern/colonial system has profound implications for our understanding of contemporary knowledge politics. Grosfoguel (2013) writes about four specific, historically located genocides/epistemicides. He borrows the term epistemicide from De Sousa Santos (2010) in Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 74) who understands it as "extermination of knowledge and ways of knowing." The first genocide/epistemicide is the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Al-Andalus by the Catholic Monarchy conducted "under the slogan of 'purity of blood,'" just before the initial Conquest of the Americas (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 78). This genocide/epistemicide involved massive killings of Muslim and Jewish populations who inhabited the southern part of the Iberian Peninsula; brutal conversions of those who survived to Christianity; repopulation of the territory with Catholics; and burning of Muslim and Jewish libraries, which at the time were significantly larger than those of the Christians. The second genocide/epistemicide is the adoption of this model in the Conquest of the Americas. Similarly to the conquest of Al-Andalus, European penetration of the Americas comprised of ruthless killings, forced conversions to Christianity and burning of "códices," or written collections in which Amerindians stored their knowledges. The third genocide/epistemicide is that committed against Africans kidnaped and enslaved in the Americas, who "were submitted to a regime of epistemic racism that forbade their autonomous knowledge production" (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 84). The forth genocide/epistemicide was that committed against women in Europe who possessed and transmitted ancestral knowledges as "[m]illions [of them] were burned alive [and] accused of being witches [because] their autonomy, leadership and knowledge threatened Christian theology" (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 85). While this form of genocide/epistemicide was practiced already in the Middle Ages, its significant intensification in 16th and 17th century is connected to African enslavement and the wider colonial system (see Federici, 2004). The four genocides/epistemicides clearly exemplify the epistemic aspect of 15th and 16th century colonialism.

For MCD scholars, neither the fathers of Enlightenment, such as Descartes, nor those of Renaissance, including Kant, would have been able to theorise in the way they did without the four genocides/epistemicides of the 16th century (Grosfoguel, 2013; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Given that it is commonly agreed that either Enlightenment or Renaissance mark the beginning of modern philosophy, "coloniality is constitutive, not derivative, of modernity" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 4). For example, Cartesian philosophy implies a separation of the body and mind, which is a primary condition for the emergence of a detached, abstract, universal thinking subject, whose knowledge is supposedly applicable to everyone, everywhere (Grosfoguel, 2012a). However, such separation would not be possible without the previous colonial conquest, which aimed at extermination of non-White/European/heterosexual/male bodies and their ways of thinking. In other words, the colonial "I conquer, therefore I am," or "I exterminate, therefore I am" form the darker side of the modern "I think, therefore I am" (Grosfoguel, 2013). It is because of its embeddedness in colonialism, that the Cartesian thinking subject can pretend to make "claims to truth, universally valid for everyone on earth" (Grosfoguel, 2012a, p. 90). This explains Enlightenment claims to "zero-point philosophy," which is a particular perspective that presents itself as universal, independent on one's "sexuality, gender, ethnicity, race, class, spirituality, language, or epistemic location within power relations" (Grosfoguel, 2012a,

p. 89; see also Castro Gomez, 2003). Through this, and many other examples, scholars working within the MCD show that epistemic coloniality is deeply inscribed in the foundations of the modern/colonial world.

Being at the heart of modernity, epistemic coloniality cannot be understood in isolation to other forms of colonial exclusions. Here, MCD scholars turn to an Andean concept of colonial matrix of power (hereafter CMP), or "a complex structure of management and control composed of domains, levels and flows" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 142). The domains form the so-called *content of the conversation* within modernity and include its "political, economic, religious, epistemic, aesthetic, ethnic/racial, sexual/gender subjective" tools of power (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, my emphasis). The CMP implies that the domains, or the content of the conversation, are controlled at the level of enunciation, where few "experts" making claims to universal knowledge define the *terms of the conversation* (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, my emphasis). "The experts" usually govern knowledge-making institutions, such as "colleges, universities [or] research centres [and are] trained and experienced politicians, CEOs of banks and corporations" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 143). The functioning of the CMP and the wider modern/colonial epistemic politics is key to decolonial pedagogy, which I analyse in the next section.

3.3 | MCD and decolonial education

Conceptualisations of knowledge politics within the modern/colonial system translate into specific aspects of decolonial education. For example, when Mignolo writes about the CMP, he underlines that "decoloniality shall focus on changing *the terms of the conversation* that would change the content" as mere changes in the content leave colonial structures intact (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 144, my emphasis). This is aligned with multiple student campaigns and recent academic interventions that call for decolonisation of education understood as deep, structural rearrangement of the system. For them, coloniality of contemporary universities is a multi-faceted issue that encompasses a broad range of political, economic, and cultural exclusions of non-White/male/European/Christian/heterosexual students and academics.

Another explicit reference to decolonial education is Walsh's (2015) critique of Freire's work. She reflects on the development of her praxis following Freire's death and her experiences participating in the *Escuelita Zapatista* (the Zapatista's pedagogical project). She explains the changing meaning of revolutionary, liberating education for critical consciousness and defines "decolonial pedagogies as actions that promote and provoke the fissuring or cracking of the modern/colonial order, and enable and give sustenance and force to the otherwise" (Walsh, 2015, p. 19). Elsewhere, Walsh (2007, p. 227) suggests that critical theory is not immune to epistemic universalisms and exclusions and decolonial education has to reach beyond it. For her, an engagement with decolonial pedagogies requires reflection on the following questions: "who produces critical knowledge, for what purposes, and with what recognition?" (Walsh, 2007 , p. 227).

A further set of interventions which focus on the relation between coloniality, contemporary university, and a possible shift to a pluriversity is published in the special issue of *Human Architecture* (2012). The issue was prepared following a conference entitled *Which University and Universalism for Europe Tomorrow? A Dialogue with the Americas*. De Sousa Santos's (2012) intervention poses 12 "strong questions" for contemporary universities concerned with decolonising universities in the age of globalisation, knowledge economies, university rankings, the Bologna process, unhealthy employment hierarchies, the public status of the university, and epistemic universalism. Grosfoguel (2012b, p. 89) adds that theoretical frameworks, which underpin research at Westernised universities, are "based on the knowledge produced by a few men from five countries in Western Europe (Italy, France, England, Germany and the USA)." He links their epistemic privilege with the four genocides/epistemicides and concludes that

> to decolonize the structures of knowledge of the Westernized university will require among other things to: 1) acknowledge the provincialism and epistemic racism/sexism [...] 2) break with the uni-versalisms where one defines for the rest [...] 3) bring epistemic diversity to the canon of thought to create a pluri-verse of meanings and concepts. (Grosfoguel, 2012b)

While the focus in here is on decolonial education grounded in epistemic pluriversality, profound material and structural changes within the system are necessary for decolonial praxis. In relation to this, MCD scholars are in agreement with their colleagues working with postcolonial and anti-colonial theories, to which I turn next.

3.4 | Decolonial education beyond the MCD

Beyond well-known works of Freire (1970, 1978, 1985) and hooks (1991, 1994, 2003), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is considered as a pioneer in thinking about decolonial pedagogy (Thiong'o, 1981). In his seminal piece, *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ focuses on the role of language in education and argues for a liberating pedagogy, re-centring Africa through writing and teaching in African languages. For Mbembe (2016), Ngũgĩ's work is crucial to contemporary efforts to decolonise African universities. Intellectuals committed to decolonial education also turn to Fanon (1963), especially his critique of "Africanization" in the third chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*. There, Fanon offers lessons on the limits of short-sighted views of postcolonial nation building, which is often confined to a transfer of power from former colonial metropoles to a small group of privileged bourgeoisie from the former colonies. According to Mbembe (2016), Fanon's critique develops an understanding of decolonial education as a project of deep epistemic, economic, political, and racial restructuring. In postcolonial contexts, Spivak's (2004, 2012) *Righting Wrongs* and *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* both critique hegemonic understanding of learning and teaching for its coloniality. Spivak argues that an aesthetic education, deeply embedded in critical, place-based humanities is the most effective tool for bringing about justice for the postcolonial, globalised world. Alexander (2005) in her book *Pedagogies of Crossing*, conceptualises contemporary colonial oppressions and liberation struggles as pedagogies in themselves. Focussing on "the multiple operations of power, of gendered and sexualized power that is simultaneously raced and classed" and works beyond the confines of a single nation-state, Alexander argues for a constructive reading of multiple forms of oppression as difficult lessons in more inclusive, "more fully human" way of being in the world (Alexander, 2005, pp. 4–17). While these contributions represent a range of postcolonial, decolonial, and anti-colonial takes on education, a distinct approach emerges from academics and activists in settler colonial contexts, especially Canada and New Zealand.

In the settler colonial context, scholars turn to an article by Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 2) who critique "civil and human rights-based social justice projects" for "subsuming" decolonisation as a metaphor for their political commitments. They argue that decolonisation "is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression" but a project which specifically aims at "repatriation of Indigenous land" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, pp. 1–3). Their focus on settler's "moves to innocence" and ethics of incommensurability are of key importance to anyone committed to the decolonisation of education. While Tuck and Yang's (2012) point is at a certain tension with a very broad, intersectional understanding of coloniality articulated by MCD scholars, the two can be understood through the context of their enunciation. Decolonisation and decoloniality are not exactly the same. The former is a struggle against colonialism, including settler colonialism, and the latter against coloniality. Decolonial praxis in Latin America involves a slightly different set of actions to decolonising praxis in Canada or New Zealand. Importantly, both decolonial and decolonising pedagogies argue for a praxis that is context-specific and offers a deep restructuring of learning and teaching within the modern/colonial and settler colonial contexts, respectively. Neither decolonial nor decolonising pedagogies claim universality and both have to be considered as equally important parts of a decolonial pluriverse of understandings.

Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy (2014, p. 13) argue for land education, understood as

> Education [that] puts Indigenous epistemological and ontological accounts of land at the centre, including Indigenous understandings of land, Indigenous language in relation to land, and Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism. It attends to constructions and storying of land and repatriation by Indigenous peoples, documenting and advancing Indigenous agency and land rights.

According to Chambers (2008), as discussed in Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy (2014, p. 14), land education requires a "curriculum of place [which] calls for a different sense of time, enskillment, 'education of attention' and wayfinding." A land-based decolonising praxis is further developed by Smith et al. (2019). In their recent collection authored by a large group of Indigenous scholars and practitioners, *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education*, they reflect on practical examples of land education, complexities of intersectionality, community education, decolonising education projects implemented on a mass scale, and many others. In settler colonial contexts, Wane and Todd (2018), Cote-Meek (2014), and Kuokkanen (2007) all offer theoretically and empirically rich analyses of decolonial resistance in, primarily Canadian, educational contexts. In the next section, I analyse geographers' most recent efforts to address issues tackled by decolonial education literatures within the context of our discipline.

4 | DECOLONISING GEOGRAPHICAL EDUCATION

Geographers have brought debates surrounding decolonial education to our discipline in multiple ways. Such contributions focus primarily on decolonising geographical knowledge and decolonising geographical higher education. The majority of interventions are centred around the 2017 RGS-IBG conference chaired under the theme of *Decolonising geographical knowledges: opening geography out to the world* (see Sundberg, 2014; Cupples & Glynn, 2014 for examples of geographers' previous engagements with decolonial literatures). Both *Area* and *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* published special issues on the conference's theme. Below, I will first analyse responses which focus on decolonising geographical education and then on decolonising geographical knowledges more broadly.

4.1 | Decolonising geographical education

Following a visit to the University of Cape Town and the Rhodes Must Fall campaign, Elliott-Cooper (2017, p. 332), a geographer based at a British university, asks "how can our work be used to dismantle colonialism and its legacies?" He suggests that

> *geographers sit at a historical crossroads in academia, and there is no middle, benevolent way forward. We can either attempt to ignore, and implicitly reproduce, the imperial logics that have influenced the shape of British Geography since its inception, or actively rethink and dismantle imperialism's afterlife by unlearning the unjust global hierarchies of knowledge production on which much of the Empire's legitimacy was based. (Elliott-Cooper, 2017, p. 334)*

Esson (2018) takes the debate further and asks why the geography curriculum is so white? He uses analytical tools from critical race theory, social justice, and decolonial approaches to suggest proposals for change, including a communal adoption of antiracist positions in response to all kinds of racisms. Based on ethnographic material, Tolia-Kelly (2017) analyses qualitative accounts of everyday racism experienced individually by a group of Black, female geography scholars. Following this analysis, she "calls for race equality to effect change in the everyday experience of racisms within academia, beyond paper politics" and suggests that "an empathetic approach to the treatment of black colleagues is necessary" (Tolia-Kelly, 2017, p. 324). Desai (2017) offers a quantitative look into the experiences of BME geographers. The numbers are frightening. The proportion of BME staff members in geography departments is half of the average number of BME staff at U.K. universities. The percentage of BME students who choose to study geography is on average 13 points smaller compared with an average across other disciplines. Only 7% of geography undergraduates are BME. Their degree results, especially first class degrees are lower than those of White students (see also McIlwaine & Bunge, 2018). Perhaps one of the reasons for this discrepancy is that, as geographers, we do

not do enough to rethink our curricula and courses as they continue to privilege White students and their perspectives.

A hopeful exception to this is Daigle and Sundberg's (2017) paper, in which they self-reflect on the process of co-teaching an introductory human geography course, re-designed to unsettle colonial and racist knowledge production. The obstacles they faced, especially in the form of "anger, frustration, hostility, antagonism, denial, sorrow and pride" expressed by the students taking the course, show the profound decolonial potential of their approach. While not explicitly decolonial, a special issue on geography textbooks might offer somewhat similar inspirations regarding more critical teaching praxis (Murray & Overton, 2018; Sidaway & Hall, 2018; Sparke, 2018). Speaking to our positionality beyond lecture theatres, Legg (2017, p. 347) argues for decolonialism, rather than decoloniality. He understands the former as "challenging the practices that made colonies and which sustain colonial durabilities" as opposed to the latter, conceptualised as "un-acquiring colonies." As such, decolonialism emphasises an infinite and processual project, which does not claim a specific endpoint, that is, "the wholly decolonised academic subject" (Legg, 2017, p. 347).

While all of these interventions argue for a need to address the colonial nature of current geographical education, given the sheer size of our discipline, many more students and academics need to be involved in decolonial efforts for geography classrooms and lecture rooms to become more decolonial.

4.2 | Decolonising geographical knowledges

Beyond focusing on education, geographers also question the politics of knowledge production within the discipline. Such debates have been going on for at least 20 years, especially amongst feminist and postcolonial geographers (Blunt & McEwan, 2002; Blunt & Wills, 2000; Domosh & Seager, 2001; Jazeel & McFarlane, 2010; Noxolo, 2009; Noxolo, Raghuram, & Madge, 2008; Power, 2003; Rose, 1997). Below, I focus on most recent accounts which explicitly relate to decolonial theories.

In her article *Decolonising Geographical Knowledges*, Radcliffe (2017) overviews decolonial literatures and suggests that "decolonising geography socially and institutionally is [...] an uphill struggle to confront and dismantle [what Derickson (2017, 236) calls] the 'unbearable whiteness of geography.'" While she asks questions about possible shapes and forms of geographers' future multi-epistemic fluency, Noxolo (2017) questions the very possibility and politics of the decolonial process. Together with other members of the RACE working group (Race, Culture and Equality Working Group of the RGS-IBG), she offers a critique of the 2017 RGS-IBG conference's theme (Esson, Noxolo, Baxter, Daley, & Byron, 2017). To them, a "pursuit of critical consciousness via decolonial thinking could do more harm than good" (Esson et al., 2017, p. 384). Drawing on Tuck and Yang (2012) and Rivera Cusicanqui (2012), the RACE group underlines that decolonial efforts must go far beyond a mere inclusion of non-Western knowledges into our curricula. They argue that decolonising geography must be focused on structures, institutions and praxis, and that "the terms on which the discipline starts debates about decolonisation and decoloniality are determined by those racialized as indigenous and non-white by coloniality" (Esson et al., 2017, p. 384). Similarly, Baldwin (2017, p. 329) insists that

> the RGS-IBG conference risks reproducing the very disciplinary privilege it seeks to unsettle by recentering "white" academics as the agents of something called "decolonising geographical knowledge", while marginalising Indigenous scholars and activists at the forefront of struggles for decolonisation.

He suggests that the conference's theme should be an opportunity for geographers to become more critical of our own "moves to innocence" and rethink what democracy might mean for contemporary universities. Baldwin also draws on Tuck and Yang (2012) to suggest that a consideration of an "ethic of incommensurability" is crucial to decolonial debates. Reflecting on the wider context of the British academy, Halvorsen (2018) expresses a similar concern. He draws on his collaboration with Argentine academics in the context of career progression during the

post-PhD period and suggests that "current enthusiasm with southern epistemologies may be paving the way for the intensification of epistemic expropriation" (Halvorsen, 2018, p. 11). Developing the latter concept in detail, he suggests that recent efforts to include non-Western epistemologies in Western academia might strengthen the "Anglophone hegemony in 'international' geography" (Halvorsen, 2018). While critical of the potential pitfalls of the 2017 RGS-IBG conference theme, Jazeel (2017) draws attention to what might go unnoticed in the light of the numerous productive critiques of the decolonising project. Namely, that the mainstreaming of geography's decolonial imperative "invites us all as disciplinary geographers to share what the anthropologist Scott (2004) cited in Jazeel (2017, p. 334) calls a 'problem space,'" or a space of contestation where a debate on how to go about a task, rather than whether to undertake it, is the subject of debate. Jazeel (2017) argues that "the performative effect of this imperative-made-conference-theme is that the ongoing coloniality of geographical knowledge production is not only widely accepted, it is also now every geographer's problem." Critical debates around the meaning and shape of decolonial geographical education and knowledge production must be kept alive. Not only must we not stop debating decolonial education, but we must also make sure to translate our debates into educational praxis. To this end that in the next section, I outline a number of research directions, related both to theory and praxis, that geographers could consider as we continue thinking about opportunities and limits of decolonial initiatives.

5 | CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In the previous section, I have outlined how groups of geographers negotiate the meaning and shape of the decolonising project within our discipline. While all their contributions carry important messages regarding the logics, contradictions, and limits of decoloniality, this cannot be the end of debates about decolonial education within our discipline. As Jazeel (2017) points out, we can no longer be indifferent to the decolonial imperative, which now goes well beyond specific subdisciplines. We cannot treat decoloniality as a parochial business, or a project solely related to one conference or one particular decolonial approach. While I agree with the line of critique that highlights the limits of understanding decolonisation as mere inclusion of non-Eurocentric knowledges in our curricula, that critique must not be understood as an excuse for us to refrain from engaging in decolonial praxis. We should not forget that decolonial education goes well beyond decolonial theory and academic arguments, as it has to do with grassroots initiatives, primarily by Black, Indigenous, First Nations, Minority Ethnic students around the world, including in the United Kingdom. When these movements argue for an end to the privileging of White, male, heterosexual, European perspectives, they do not just refer to their representation in the curricula. These perspectives are clearly privileged through the wider politics, economics, and culture of the neoliberal academic model. Consequently, I conclude this review by inviting geographers to consider the following questions:

1 Given our privileged position, we are not the primary agents of decoloniality. What *is* our position within the colonial/neoliberal academic machine, and what responsibilities does it carry? Is it possible for us (and if so, how) to support decolonial struggles? For example, Cupples (2019, pp. 1–2) argues that the resurgence of decolonial campaigns at contemporary westernised universities is connected to a "profound conjunctural crisis" in which racist, neoliberal, and (re)colonilzing politics negotiate "anti-capitalist, feminist and decolonial" visions of the world. Based on this analysis, students and academics are uniquely positioned within the crisis. Is it possible (and if so, how) to negotiate the (re)colonising politics of neoliberalising academia with our own progressive commitments?

2 What would a pedagogical praxis that is attentive to calls for a change in *terms of the conversation* rather than just its *content* entail? What needs to change for such praxis to be enacted within ramifications of contemporary educational institutions?

3 What would a decolonial approach to geographical education look like, especially in terms of praxis, if it was to engage with ideas and methods formulated in other fields, such as decolonial pedagogy (Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew, & Hunt, 2015; de Lissovoy, 2010, 2017; Smith et al., 2019; Stein, 2018; Wane & Todd, 2018; see also

Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society journal) or sociology (Bhambra et al., 2018; De Sousa Santos, 2017; Tamdgidi, 2012)?

4 Decolonial scholarship clearly indicates pluriverse as an alternative, decolonial world, in which "many worlds fit," to borrow from the Zapatistas. Such pluriverse cannot be mistaken for anything goes liberalism, the latter being underpinned by knowledges which claim universality and define for all. How do we, as geographers, make sure that the distinction between pluriverse and laissez-faire liberalism is clear? What tools (practical and theoretical) do we need, to identify knowledges, which aim to re-colonise? How do we establish solidarity, which at the same time unpacks Western epistemic privilege and does not overly romanticise non-Western knowledges?

5 According to Desai (2017), 55,600 high school students took A-level Geography in 2014 alone (a number which has most likely increased significantly since then). As academics who both explicitly consult and implicitly shape high school curricula, do we not have a responsibility to disrupt White, Eurocentric, heterosexual claims to universality frequently reproduced in geography classrooms around the United Kingdom and beyond? How could we do this?

6 Vast majority of geographers' responses to decolonial debates come from human geographers. Given a strong emphasis on land, interdisciplinarity, and alternative methodologies, what would a decolonial physical geography entail?

7 Rather than a mode of thought, decoloniality is "a way" and "praxis" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 5). Or, to use Alexander's (2005, p. 17) term, it is about learning to find ways of being "more fully human" in the world. To what extent are we, as students, teachers, researchers, lecturers, and professors, relating to and working with each other every day in a way that is underpinned by lessons learned from colonial oppressions and grassroots decolonial struggles?

ENDNOTE

[1] Given that everyone has a particular positionality, arguably everyone is indigenous to somewhere. Throughout the article, I use the term indigenous scholars to denote those academics who identify as belonging to indigenous groups defined in relation to colonial contexts; they also often engage with non-Eurocentric epistemologies through their scholarly work.

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