Justice-centred curriculum: Decolonising educational practices to create lateral learning spaces online

Hedda Haugen Askland*, Randi Irwin, University of Newcastle, Australia
Michael Kilmister, Henley Business School, England

*hedda.askland@newcastle.edu.au

This article interrogates pedagogical practices that seek to decolonise curriculum in the context of online teaching. Calls to recognise how colonial structures continue to be reinforced through higher education has led to significant appeals to 'decolonise the curriculum' and better address Indigenous rights. This article responds to these demands by reflecting on our experiences of designing and teaching an online course, *Indigenous Peoples of the Contemporary World*. We argue that decolonising the pedagogy and the curriculum can, and must, occur across modes of teaching as part of a justice-centred educational practice. Decolonisation is a network, solidarity-based political practice, which may seem to run counter to the demands of online teaching. As such, we suggest that any attempt to decolonise online pedagogies requires additional pedagogical practices that break with traditional online teaching formats in order to challenge accepted approaches to online learning. In what follows, we reflect on our own positionality in the design of the course content and our ongoing learning as we strive to create lateral online learning spaces that centre justice. We seek to examine how we might best work within the constraints of the neoliberal university to uphold our commitment to provide a justice-centred curriculum in an online-based classroom format.

Keywords: decoloniality; justice-centred curriculum; pedagogy; online learning

We acknowledge and respect the Pambalong clan of the Awabakal people and the Darkinjung people, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work. We extend this to all Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which we work, live and play, and pay our respect to Indigenous Elders past and present. We recognise their continuing connection to the land and waters, and thank them for protecting the lands from which we gain life. We recognise the past atrocities against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this land and that Australia was founded on the dispossession and genocide of First Nations people. We acknowledge that colonial structures and policies remain in place and that Indigenous peoples, in Australia and beyond, continue to struggle for justice, recognition and respect. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal Land.

Introduction

This paper analyses our efforts to transform a third-year anthropology course from its traditional face-to-face mode to a fully online course. The course, *Indigenous Peoples in the Contemporary World*, had been rested for a few years due to low enrolment numbers, and its viability was questioned from a market-oriented framework. For us, the course was, however, central to the anthropological curriculum and an essential course from the perspective of advocacy, equity and justice. The idea of cutting the university's only sociology/anthropology third-year course that focusses specifically on the conditions of Indigenous peoples within post-colonial contexts seemed an outrage. The political implications of the course and the importance of making it attractive to potential students were made evident when confronted by statements from colleagues that 'our students don't care about these issues' or (in relation to future employability) 'students don't see the value of such a course.' For us, as a starting point, such statements illuminate the problem we face within the contemporary neoliberal university: if this is right (something that counters our experience) students must be made aware of the importance of the issues that Indigenous peoples face and they must be given the opportunity to learn and understand with the aims of empowering them to translate this knowledge into advocacy towards justice-centred outcomes that are led by and for Indigenous communities. Furthermore, these statements call for a reckoning with the disciplinary history of anthropology and the need to respond to the demands from First Peoples and scholars to do better. This requires attention to decolonial pedagogies and calls for caution around theoretical approaches that have extracted Indigenous epistemologies and mobilised them as detached theoretical concepts, exacerbating practices of dispossession (see Todd 2016).

In this article, we will outline how we came to grapple with the tensions and challenges we faced in digitalising the course and reframing it as a decolonial course. Each of the authors engaged with the course in different stages of its transformation: Askland was first challenged to transform the course in its face-to-face iteration when it became part of her teaching portfolio at the onset of her employment as Lecturer of Anthropology at the University of Newcastle in 2014; Kilmister, a learning designer, was brought in on the course design and development as Askland grappled with its transferral to its new online medium in 2020; and Irwin came on board as the instructor of the online module when it first went live in 2021.The transformation of the course has, thus, been an incremental journey during which we have reflected on the philosophy and ethics of decolonial pedagogies and Indigenous storywork – meaning the study of traditional story-telling practises and their incorporation into modern-day education (Archibald 2008). In what follows, we explore the contradictions, possibilities and limitations within our attempt to offer a justice-centred course that seeks to decolonise both the curriculum and the pedagogical practices in the online teaching and learning space.

We want to first acknowledge the limitations of this approach. As Tuck and Yang (2012) rightly point out, there is no decolonising of educational systems in the context of ongoing struggles for land and sovereignty; decolonisation requires the return of land. Our personal attempts to decolonise will always fall short of achieving this within the classroom; however, we firmly believe that by operating within this framework we can collectively work with students to build better analytical frames for recognising and countering injustice. As a result, we work *with* students to build a complex and contemporary understanding of the complexities of Indigenous struggles in the contemporary world and highlight the ways in which these struggles remain tightly bound within systems of violence, inequity and ongoing colonial dispossession. We implore them to critically examine the (im)possibilities for justice-centred change while actively amplifying demands from Indigenous communities with a specific attention to battles over Indigenous sovereignty and land rights in the context of the ongoing violence of settler and

colonial state refusal (see Tuck & Yang 2012). Thus, it is important that students not leave the course with the sense that the job is 'finished'; the same holds for us as three white authors who must recognise our own complicity as settlers in Australia, particularly as two of us have reasserted that violence in our own decisions to immigrate and settle in Australia as adults.

While we seek to rage collectively with our students and dismantle the hierarchies at the core of university pedagogies in order to create lateral learning spaces, we must also recognise our limits and the structural realities within which we work. This is perhaps best evidenced in Askland's call to action – to 'rage against the machine' – in week one of the course. In a welcome video that seeks to frame the course's attention to justice, Askland sets out the terms by which the online classroom will work against hierarchies, but at the same time, the call to rage is accompanied with the language of educational hierarchies that instruct, introduce and tell students about injustice and Indigenous struggles – particularly in the context of this course which included Aboriginal students and Māori students. While in practice the course creates spaces that prioritise non-hierarchical dialogue and lateral learning, the language of instruction remains haunted by the very power, privilege and expertise we seek to disrupt. In the introductory video to the course Askland says:

> In this course I offer you a challenge: I want you to become an activist. I want you to go beyond being a citizen and become a fighter, an agent of change, a rebel, a reformer. I want you to adopt all the learning and critical theory you have encountered so far in your degree and that I will introduce you to in this course, and translate it into practice [...] Over the next weeks, I will tell you about power and injustice, resistance and resilience as these themes relate to Indigenous peoples. I will offer multiple examples of past and current failures of our social and political system in recognising Indigenous peoples' rights; I will tell you stories of violence and injustice; I will tell you about people who have fought against this violence and injustice, and who have rallied for the recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights. Through this, I will encourage you, without apology, to become an activist; to become someone who sees and recognises social injustice, someone who speaks out about inequity and for the rights of those who suffer, someone who challenges the power of the privileged and rages against the machine that produces systematic inequity and violence.

The online platform and the danger of the white intermediaries

In 2019, we were tasked to set the course for the digital educational platform FutureLearn. Through this platform our university hoped to connect with a potential market beyond its normal reach. FutureLearn's pedagogical model is centred on the values of social, flexible, experiential and purposeful learning. Through the platform, learners can study hundreds of courses across a range of disciplines. FutureLearn's research and development is outwardly pedagogy-led, with universities and other partners encouraged to embrace the platform's learning philosophy, which is underpinned by a social constructivist approach that recognises learning as a collaborative practice, involving peer interactions, discussions and investigations guided by the educator (Swinnerton, Morris, Hotchkiss & Pickering 2017).

FutureLearn was the chosen platform for the aspirational project, the 'BA Online', which seeks to boost enrolment numbers in an era that has seen a significant decline in funding, cuts to the sector and reduced perception of the economic and societal value of a humanities education (Doidge, Doyle & Hogan 2019; O'Mahony, Garga, Thomas & Kimber 2019; Turner & Brass

2014). Initially, we embraced the opportunity to be involved in the BA Online project and were excited about the opportunities the platform and the provision of a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) provided for our course. A key goal of the BA Online is to transform the Bachelor of Arts into a contemporary learning space premised on a multidisciplinary degree that expands opportunities for non-traditional students to participate in higher education. Opening up access to students around the world, FutureLearn offered something of an answer to the need for the humanities to spread the message about the significance of the arts in the contemporary world. At the same time, it addressed the university's need for enrolments and, as a result, the shift from a physical to virtual classroom can also be placed within the capitalist framework of students as consumers (Connell 2019).

In what follows, we take seriously Todd's (2016, p. 7) concern with the 'filtering (of) ideas through white intermediaries', which subsequently functions to both mediate and usurp Indigenous epistemologies. In the context of our task, we had to grapple with our own whiteness, the whiteness of our disciplines, the whiteness of the university as an institution, and the whiteness of the online platform on which the course was set. Our collective goal in building, designing, and delivering this course has not been to speak for – or on behalf of – Indigenous peoples. Instead, we have sought to utilise the very opportunities afforded by the nature of online learning to include Indigenous voices, media, art and scholarship throughout the course through guest visits and studio interviews and reading lists. Pedagogically, we have sought to design and deliver the course in a way that reflects our commitment to stand alongside and with Indigenous peoples.

This move remains part of a larger concern and unease with the 'extraction' of Indigenous stories. Along these lines we have sought to respond to Spice's critique of anthropology's disciplinary history of extraction. Spice outlines what such a practice might look like, noting:

> a decolonizing anthropology of course needs to reform the way in which others are represented, built it also needs to detail its entanglements with the structures of settler colonialism in the past and present [...] The ivory tower, after all, was also built on stolen Indigenous land – as well as chattel slavery.
> (Spice 2016, n.p.)

As we outline below, our course design and content sought to introduce students to these complex and troubling disciplinary histories in order to interrogate the production of Western, colonial epistemologies while also emphasising the rich intellectual histories of Indigenous knowledge through direct engagement with materials from Indigenous scholars and activists. Despite this, we must recognise our ongoing position within the nexus of the university's neoliberal agenda to build the reputation and profit of the university through its focus on 'work ready graduates' and 'employability,' and our own agenda to educate and advocate, to make a call for action, and to highlight schools of thought that are too often muted, erased, or stolen in the writings of white scholars that overwhelmingly subsume higher education and act as gatekeepers in the metrics of higher education (see also Moreton-Robinson 2002).

It should be noted that the course's academic predecessors had aspired to work to raise Indigenous voices and advance the students' understanding of the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism. For better or worse, the initial trigger for our revisions and transformation of the course came from internal pressures within our institutions to better speak to the sectors' call to produce 'work ready graduates' and advance the humanities and social sciences from their emphasis on critical inquiry and expansion of knowledge to professional and engaged degrees

with set marketable skills. Yet again, this approach coincides with an increasingly market-oriented, neoliberal university (e.g. Connell 2019). Within this context, the opportunity to be creative and embrace new learning and assessment designs that could unsettle the conventional power relationships between students and academic staff, along with the possibility to centre Indigenous knowledge via interviews, texts, lectures, film, music and art emerged.

In what follows, we will first seek to establish our approach to decolonial, justice-centred pedagogy. The literature on decolonial pedagogy in online educational spaces is scant and, given the paucity of scholarship in this area, we will seek to offer some practical advice and inspiration for how to decolonise online teaching. While there is a large and diverse body of literature on decolonising the curriculum and other critical pedagogies, like feminist pedagogy (e.g. De Jong, Rosalba & Rutazibwa 2018), this paper joins a limited and still emerging scholarship focussed on online teaching specifically. Studies about experiences of decolonising online classrooms are less common in the decolonial pedagogy literature than those that focus on face-to-face teaching. It is perhaps not surprising that online teaching has not received much attention as the movement to decolonise the curriculum has, to date, centred on how decolonisation of the university entails decolonising its physical presence, as well as course syllabi (Chigudu 2020). Yet, other factors can explain the neglect of the digital in the scholarship. Fully online teaching, particularly the asynchronous teaching mode, usually demands educators prepare course materials well in advance, which creates tension with the notion that university curricula cannot be decolonised according to formula or 'recipes' (Behari-Leak et al. 2017). Online courses have been criticised within the academy for being driven by technological determinism, undermining educator agency, and making higher education impersonal and mechanical (Watermeyer, Crick, Knight & Goodall 2020), qualities that run counter to the aims of decolonial pedagogy and decolonising the curriculum initiatives. MOOCs are especially seen as suspect as they are predominantly created by universities in the Global North on centralised, for-profit platforms, and pushed out to learners in the Global South with little regard to local infrastructure, values and learning needs (Adam 2019). However, as online and distance teaching are increasingly husbanded by universities in their effort to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (2015), scholarship in this area is slowly growing (e.g. Spiegel et al. 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic and emergency remote teaching also appears to be factors that are contributing to the emergence of the virtual classroom and its relations and dynamics as a distinct strand of the broader decolonial pedagogy literature (e.g. Ripero-Muñiz, Senabe, Maseko & Reigadas 2021).

We argue that a decolonial pedagogy – for both virtual and physical classrooms – requires an embrace of the political work of teaching and that a decolonial approach to teaching necessitates humbleness and reflection, as well as a recognition of such a pedagogy as an ongoing journey. In this sense, we draw on our training as anthropologists and humanists to inform our approaches to this pedagogical practice; one that is premised on learning with students through continuous collaboration and dialogue in order to disrupt, perhaps even dismantle, hierarchies. It is against the backdrop of this core argument that our aim is stated: to contribute to a conversation that can advance a journey towards an increasingly decolonial pedagogy as a networked, solidarity-based political practice centred on the core principles of justice, equity, respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility.

Representing Indigenous Knowledge: A pedagogy of and at the border

Decolonisation is messy and has multiple, contested meanings, making a compact definition or prescriptive guide an arguably elusive goal (Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew & Hunt 2015). Online asynchronous teaching – with its carefully constructed content produced months before semester begins – is, however, less elastic than live teaching contexts like tutorials, so a coherent set of substantive principles needed to be decided upon to ensure consistency across the course design.

While we recognised decolonisation is a contested and complex terrain (Gopal 2021), as a starting point, we landed on a selection of decolonial pedagogical principles we sought to implement: reframing education as a tool for empowerment and resistance of injustice; decentring dominant groups to make space for marginalised voices and experiences; engaging specifically with Indigenous and diverse voices; being deliberately political; and, recognising decolonisation is a long-term, iterative process (Silva & The Students for Diversity Now 2018; Wane & Todd 2018). We further acknowledged the roots of decolonial pedagogy in the broader school of critical pedagogies, which interrogate seemingly settled, hegemonic bodies of knowledge and question how that knowledge is created and maintained via gatekeeping practices (Freire 1970; hooks 1994).

In our experience, the debate about Indigenisation and decolonial pedagogy easily gets stuck on 'alternative knowledge models'. This continues to centre the hegemony of white knowledge within higher education and the fact that this hegemonic way of knowing was produced through the exploitation and oppression of the Global South, as well as Indigenous and marginalised peoples within the peripheries and the imperial centres alike. In this context, approaches to decolonial pedagogy become a matter of decolonising the curriculum, the hierarchies of higher education and its staffing. For example, the Rhodes Must Fall student-led protests in 2015 sought to challenge the institutional and epistemic violence that Black students faced at the University of Cape Town by calling for university-wide transformations that would centre Black students.

Following from the Rhodes Must Fall protest in South Africa – which was linked to the Fees Must Fall movement – calls from university students and staff have continued to grow for a more accessible university system and a dismantling of the current forms of exclusivity that limit access for non-white students, while policing the hierarchies of prestige upon which higher education is built (see Mbembe 2016). Alongside issues of access, movements to decolonise the university have demanded an overhaul of the forms of knowledge and the canons through which Western, colonial knowledge maintains it liveliness. As Mbembe (2016, p. 32) has argued:

> A Eurocentric canon is a canon that attributes truth to only the Western way of knowledge production. It is a canon that disregards other epistemic traditions. It is a canon that tries to portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression.

We have taken this point from Mbembe and student activists seriously to reflect on the use of canonical literature throughout the course design. These calls push beyond the approach that has nominally gained widespread acceptance within academia, namely to simply diversify the curriculum to include more racialised writers, and instead contribute to the debate about what it means to decolonise the canon (e.g. Arshad 2021; Muldoon 2019). However, despite a seemingly broader acceptance of the need to diversify the academic canon, course outlines, academic journals and university retention systems (like tenure) have not always matched these calls to action at the same speed and commitment that might truly amount to decolonising the university. Furthermore, as sociologist Raewyn Connell contends, to decolonise the curriculum is more than simply adding more diverse and racialised authors to the list of readings. Indeed, the structures of the university itself must not be exempt from interrogation and critique.

The issues at the heart of the Rhodes Must Fall protests featured within disciplinary debates and the higher education sector well before the direct actions for the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes and the subsequent occupation and civil disobedience in 2015. Almost two decades

before, Kirkness and Bernhardt (1991) published a paper about First Nations and higher education in an edited volume about knowledge across cultures. In this paper they address the historical underrepresentation of First Nations people in the ranks of college and university graduates in North America. They argue that:

> If universities are to respect the cultural integrity of First Nations students and communities, they must adopt a posture that goes beyond the usual generation and conveyance of literate knowledge, to include the institutional legitimation of indigenous [*sic*] knowledge and skills, or as Goody has put it, to foster "a re-evaluation of forms of knowledge that are not derived from books" (Kirkness & Bernhardt 1991, p. 8).

This, they continue, is 'a responsibility that requires an institutional respect for indigenous [*sic*] knowledge', and an aptitude 'to help students to appreciate and build upon their customary forms of consciousness and representation as they expand their understanding of the world in which they live in' (Kirkness & Bernhardt 1991, p. 8). Kirkness and Bernhardt, as well as Archibald (1990) and other scholars of the time, emphasise the relevance of First Nations' perspectives and experiences being incorporated into higher education knowledge constructions, and speak specifically to efforts of constructing Indigenous theories of education, as well as establishing reciprocal relationships that can break down the structural and cultural constraints facing Indigenous students. Although this is somewhat different to the debate about decolonising the curriculum, at its core is the shared recognition that 'higher education is not a neutral enterprise' (Kirkness & Bernhardt 1991, p. 11).

The call to decolonise the curriculum has motivated academics to include readings by non-white scholars from non-European localities, and to acknowledge the colonial history of the literature and data. There have been discussions and debate about potential for change and curriculum for reform, with recognition of how the call to decolonise or Indigenise the curriculum speaks to the relationship between democracy and education. This brings us back to Connell's assertion that a decolonised curriculum must be more than a diversification of the reading list. Such a point is similarly made by anthropologists Rosa and Bonilla (2017) who draw attention to the distinction between diverse authors and diverse epistemologies in their suggestion that 'although there is room for native *voices,* there is rarely room for native *theory*'. As Daswani (in O'Sullivan 2019) notes, the system of academic publishing perpetuates and reproduces its power and prestige at the core of the university system.

These critiques run deeper than academic publishing practices. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) argues that the very conditions of Western knowledge production and research are premised on – and perpetuate – imperial categories and pathways for control. As such Smith suggests, *Western* knowledge production is inherently, at its core, *imperial*. As Moreton-Robinson (2015 p. 191) argues, 'the possessive logics of patriarchal white sovereignty require the constructions of Indigeneity to be validated and measured through different regulatory mechanisms and disciplinary knowledges within modernity'. She suggests that this both maintains and perpetuates categories that serve to dispossess and disempower as they regulate how Indigenous peoples participate in the production of disciplinary knowledge. This demands attention to how the issue of decolonising the curriculum in response to the coloniality of knowledge is not simply a matter of a clash of cultures but, rather, a concern about the operation of social, political and institutional power. Moreton-Robinson writes (2015 p. 131, emphasis added):

> What would be useful is to consider the representation of power within the law-rights-sovereignty paradigm by approaching the relationship between Indigenous sovereignty and state sovereignty as relations of force located within a matrix of biopower. This is to identify and explicate the coexistence and mutual imbrications of a universal discourse of individual human rights and the prerogative of collective white possession that underpins the Australian national project. […] (W)hite possession manifests as a mode of rationality in a variety of disciplines, such as law, history, Australian studies, *anthropology,* Aboriginal studies, and political science, from the rights activism of the 1970s to the present.

Yet, discussions of retracting the lens to consider pedagogy (as distinct from content) are more limited in scope, and many seem to be missing the mark that to decolonise the curriculum is – as we see from Moreton-Robinson – not just about questioning where our knowledge comes from and offering diverse content, but it also requires teaching in reflexive and inclusive ways that ask the students for their views on the teaching itself. To deliver a justice-centred pedagogy that amplifies demands to decolonise the university and our pedagogy, we must also flip the pedagogical lens and challenge the power relationships embedded within the teaching and learning context in and of itself. It is a matter of empowering learners to recognise, analyse and *do* something about the injustice they are hearing, reading and learning about. It becomes a matter of harnessing the classroom's potential as a source from which they 'rage against the machine' or become a 'smasher of hegemonies'.

The political activism underpinning this approach to a decolonial pedagogy intersect with what Giroux classifies as 'border pedagogy' (2005). Kazanjian (2011, p. 372) summarises border pedagogy as follows:

> Border pedagogy is political in the process of rehabilitating the historical and ideological institutions that have excluded and/or benefited from exclusions of peoples/identities/cultures. In this respect, educators become cultural workers where they become involved beyond erudite knowledge.

Border pedagogy works across three categories: (1) building students' and educators' understanding of the boundaries of knowledge and privilege from which they speak; (2) encouraging students to redefine the borders and become 'border crossers' who create 'borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power' (Giroux 2005, p. 20); and, (3) creating a new lens for examining language and institutions of power and their effect on social relations, and for making visible the historical and social apparatuses of and at the border, their strengths and limitations (Giroux 2005). This type of pedagogy requires a heightened level of reflexivity and, to actualise its potential, 'educators should be training students to understand their own voice in the complexities of their history' (Kazanjian 2011, p. 373). When applied successfully, border pedagogy will support both Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners, serving two parallel purposes. First, the establishment of a more respectful, responsible and reciprocal learning environment in which Indigenous students' lives, cultures and knowledges are celebrated, affirmed and amplified, while subsequently supporting these students as they navigate the hegemonic, neoliberal university that so often demands that Indigenous students engage through assimilation instead of through a positionality centred on justice and empowerment. Secondly, it may facilitate the advancement of commitments and partnerships for Indigenous people's rights, reclamation and reaffirmation of traditions within post-colonial and settler colonial

settings. This approach brings Indigenous and non-Indigenous students together by turning the lens of cultural assimilation away from Indigenous students and onto their non-Indigenous peers who are challenged to question the hegemonic knowledge domain and their privilege. As Giroux (2005, p. 22) explains, border pedagogy 'offers the opportunity for students to engage the multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences, and languages'. It gives them the tools with which to interrogate and understand the principles that define their experience, to develop an emic (insider) appreciation of cultural difference, and understand other identities, narratives and histories as they have understood their own (Kazanjian 2011, p. 373–4).

Ultimately, a decolonial pedagogy – to which border pedagogy offers some strategies – seeks to move beyond 'enlightenment', to go further than replicating the teleology of modernity and progress. Just like decoloniality in itself, a decolonial pedagogy seeks to 'make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and thought' (Mignolo & Walsh 2018, p. 17). It seeks to evoke a 'decolonial attitude', which, as Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 262) explains, 'demands responsibility and the willingness to take many perspectives, particularly the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as indispensable and insignificant'. Such an attitude – which is a recall of the decolonial approach advanced by WEB Du Bois in the early twentieth century in his efforts to look 'at the pathology of the world from the position of those regarded as most pathological and in some way non-human' (Maldonado-Torres 2007, p. 262) – requires attention to 'relational ways of seeing the world, including the relation between privilege and oppression' (Mignolo & Walsh 2018, p. 17). It is, in the words of Mignolo and Walsh (2018, p. 17), a way of seeing that 'challenges the reader to think *with* (and not simply *about*) the peoples, subjects, struggles, knowledges, and thought present here. In doing so, it urges the reader to give attention to her or his own *inner eyes*'. A decolonial pedagogy, in other words, seeks to advance a particular type of *praxis* through which 'affirmative and prospective thought-action-reflections-actions' are nurtured and 'give shape, movement, meaning, and form to decoloniality' and a decolonial subject who 'walks decoloniality' (Mignolo & Walsh 2017, pp. 17–18).

The challenge: In practice

As mentioned above, the course that we were tasked to move online is a third-year anthropology offering that explores the theme of *Indigenous Peoples in the Contemporary World*. The course offers a critical social account of the contemporary social, cultural, economic and political situations of Indigenous peoples across the world. It seeks to build the students' understanding of what 'Indigenous' means in the contemporary, how this overlaps with 'ethnic minorities' and the concept of the 'fourth world'. Whilst definitional clarity is important, central to the course is to bring the students into the political contestation embedded within these terms and the ways in which these categories of identification remain linked to imperial formations (Moreton-Robinson 2015). Accordingly, an important tenet of the course is to give students an alternative story to the national narratives that celebrate exploration and frontier conquest, the rise of capitalism and so-called progress, and the myths and legends celebrating modern nations' (settler) colonial history. Students are introduced to various case studies that seek to bring their critical understanding of the legacies of colonisation and the ongoing processes of domination and inequity that shape Indigenous peoples' lives, including contemporary battles over land/marine rights, co-existence with – and resistance to – settler/migrant communities, independence and nationhood, and reclamation of pre-colonial political boundaries and entities. By investigating examples of twenty-first century land use struggles (e.g. Standing Rock, Adani Carmichael Mine, the Brazilian 'war of survival'), it places distinct emphasis on how

contemporary challenges facing Indigenous peoples continue to relate to questions of land, land use and dispossession. Furthermore, all the students are invited to offer counter-hegemonic stories from their perspectives through the discussion that unfolds in relation to the various activities and steps in each week, as well as through their own advocacy, as this forms part of the course's assignment portfolio (see below).

Moving online

> *No river can return to its source, yet all rivers must have a beginning*
>
> Native American Proverb

The first task, to move online, was framed by the strategic teaching and learning framework of the University and the technical setup of FutureLearn. FutureLearn is an asynchronous learning platform; students undertake the learning at their own pace rather than needing to be present for scheduled online classes and, as such, the flexibility of online learning is retained to allow a global audience and an adaptation to students' multiple needs and circumstances. Course content is released week-by-week and students work on the same content in the same seven-day period to maintain critical mass in the discussions and other activities, thus retaining an emphasis on social learning. The structure of the course is modularised/'chunked' in a linear manner: twelve weeks became four modules of three weeks each, and each week separated into between 3–6 'activities' (or sections), which consisted of three to six 'steps' (or pages). Accordingly, the students complete about approximately twenty learning steps each week (equivalent to the time students devoted to lectures and tutorials in the face-to-face version of the course), which were crafted to scaffold learning and offer a variation of exercises and forms of engagement, including articles, videos, discussions, quizzes and polls. These steps related to different learning types according to Laurillard's conversational framework (2002): acquisition, enquiry, production, discussion, practice and collaboration.

To link together the steps, we developed a whole-course narrative, which, importantly, centred on the principles of Indigenous ways of learning – respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility – set out by Kirkness and Bernhard (1991). With the course encapsulating multiple Indigenous peoples and struggles from across the world, this required a form of storywork (Archibald, Lee-Morgan & De Santolo 2019) on our behalf, which prioritised Indigenous knowledge, thought and heritage. Our role in this process became that of facilitators for Indigenous storywork in order to present a different narrative with the aim of furthering the necessary work to 'rectify the damage and reclaim [Indigenous] ability to story-talk, story-listen, story-learn and story-teach' through a diligent engagement with Indigenous-led content and discussions made possible by the online platform (Archibald, Lee-Morgan, & De Santolo 2019, p. 7). We sought to create what Battiste (2000, cited in Archibald, Lee-Morgan & De Santolo 2019, p. 8) refers to as 'a cooperative and dignified strategy'; a task that required mindfulness of how the very story our research in the establishment of the course ran the risk of reifying hegemonic power structures and creating further marginality (Archibald, Lee-Morgan & De Santolo 2019; Swadener & Mutua 2008). Yet, we think it is worth highlighting that due to the hiring practices of the neoliberal university, it still positioned three white scholars as the gatekeepers to this storyline, tasked with determining the narrative structure and inclusions, which highlights the structural limitations to our ambition to decolonise the curriculum.

At the very starting point of our storywork, we encountered our white framing and the limitations of our storytelling within the online platform. The narrative we established was set in a classic Western narrative style of a linear story, starting 'at the beginning' and moving through to the imagined, dreamed-of future. The beginning is here shaped in itself by colonisation, but rather

than framing a 'people without history' (Wolf 1997), our beginning is this very myth and its delegitimisation. Through the various steps, with associated readings by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers, we crafted a storyline that centres Indigenous cultures and a deep respect for Indigenous ways of living and knowing. Furthermore, it is a storyline that highlights the injustice and hegemonic oppression of Indigenous peoples while also aiming to promote examples of Indigenous-led transformative action in pursuit of social justice across the globe.

Building a decolonial framework

> *Jođi lea buoret go oru – Time is a ship that never casts anchor*
>
> Sami proverb

With our storyline crafted, the task of putting together the modules, weeks, activities and steps began. A first effort was to consider the curriculum and the voices the students would hear and change the list of reading to forward relevant case studies, making Indigenous and Global South scholars the starting point. This is not to say we removed all classical readings or white scholarship; conversely, we sought to set up a conversation between such pieces and those emphasising Indigenous knowledges, alternative universalisms and Global South theory.

Decolonial and post-colonial scholarship as heralded by writers from the Global South are now set as important theoretical framings for the course. In previous iterations of the course, theory had been light, and the theoretical framework of decolonisation had been underplayed, leaving the critique and discussion somewhat superficial because deep structural constraints and alternative pathways require rigorous theoretical framing. As the course was intensified theoretically, a central part of our job was to find ways to bring the theory to life and make it accessible for students at an undergraduate level. Through the incorporation of learning tasks and assessments where the students explore empirical case studies, we developed a canvas onto which the students can, metaphorically, paint with the theory. These activities challenge the students to work with empathy and respect, to seek an emic understanding of the battles and struggles conveyed, and, through this, get to see the theory as it is lived. Through a joint focus on theory and Indigenous-led activism, students build a complex understanding of the histories of the dispossession of land and knowledge. Furthermore, by centring Indigenous voices and activism, the students gain a better understanding of the structures of exploitation as well as the agency, resistance and actions of Indigenous communities around the world who have – for decades – worked to amplify their claims and build the power necessary to resist subjugation. Building and expanding knowledge about the shared stories of resistance and struggle by attending to diverse Indigenous lives and cultures is, thus, central to the course. But, equally as important, and in line with the principles of border pedagogy, is the need to translate this knowledge and learning into practicable, justice-centred action.

Becoming activists

> *Gnatola ma no kpon sia, eyenable adelan to kpo mi sena – Until the lion has his or her own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story*
>
> Ewe proverb

A cornerstone of the course and our decolonial approach is the student assignments. This is also one of the most challenging elements of the course design and the translation of theory to practice. Ultimately, the university requires us to assess students' learning and give that learning a quantitative value that places them within a hierarchy of achievers. We are required to use rubrics and measures that break the students' learning into categories and parts. This approach

to guiding and recognising learning seem far removed from the emphasis on holistic learning and alternative pathways to knowledge, which forms part of a decolonial pedagogy and Indigenous epistemologies. The emphasis on grading is highly inequitable, disproportionately challenging students who come into a course with little prior exposure to academic discourse and little knowledge about the course (often theory) content, including Indigenous students, students of colour and students from working-class backgrounds (Gruner 2022; Threadgold, Burke & Bunn 2018). Further, grades are recognised to impede learning, working against reflection on (and dialogue about) feedback. Here, we were faced with a distinct pedagogical logic shaped by the neoliberal university's requirements for ranking (of graduates, courses, degrees, and, ultimately, the university itself) that worked *against* our desire to build an inclusive pedagogy that centres on holistic learning.

In this context, we had to choose which fight to fight and our desire to 'ungrade' (Kohn 2011) had to be put aside (for now). Working to the expectations of a summative grading schedule, we established a scaffolded assignment regime that emphasises accumulated learning and that seeks to strengthen interest in what is taught, encourage critical and reflexive thinking, and build respect, recognition, reverence and sense of responsibility. Perhaps somewhat contradictory, we created an approach to assignments that, during the process of approval, was deemed 'assessment heavy' and questioned for its viability: there are a total of five assignments that the students must complete during the 12 weeks of semester, which each adopt KWLS as a means to build reflexive learning practices, dialogue, feedback and engagement.[1]

Drawing on TallBear's feminist-Indigenous approach to inquiry (2014), the students are challenged to find a way of researching, talking about and amplifying the voices of an Indigenous group with a focus on applying the principles of 'giving back' and 'standing with'. The students choose an Indigenous group or issue, which is to be at the centre of their semester's work, and they are challenged to build an assessment portfolio guided by a justice-centred concern with the lived realities of Indigenous-led struggles. They are tasked with challenging the standard notions of objectivity and to begin their inquiry 'from the lives, experiences, and interpretations of marginalised subjects' (TallBear 2014, p. 3). Activism is embedded in the portfolio and students are told that they are not requested to present an 'objective' or 'neutral' position but, rather, to embrace a voice that can sing 'in concert with' the people whom they research and with whom they work; they are challenged to find a way to 'stand with' an Indigenous group and inquire, not at a distance, but 'based on the lives and knowledge priorities of subjects' (TallBear 2014, p. 6). Central to this approach is also the notion of peer learning, and the students first point of advocacy is with their own peer group who learn about the richness of Indigenous cultures and struggles through the various case studies that are presented through both formative and summative activities. In the process of peer engagement, students learn to recognise shared patterns of injustice and dispossession as they build specific knowledge about their case study and connect it to larger structural processes made evident by the diverse work of their peers.

Inspiring activists

> *Those who lose Dreaming are lost*
>
> Australian Aboriginal Proverb

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[1] KWLS is an approach to assignments that strives to raise student's engagement with their own learning and build reflexive practice. For each assignment, students are asked to identify what they **K**now already about the topic and what they **W**ant to know. After they have completed their research, they are asked to reflect on what they have **L**earned (including why this is important and the resources they have found), and what they **S**till want/need to learn. The last reflection seeks to make the students think about the next part of the assignment portfolio.

Our aim is that, by the end of semester, a fire has. been lit in the students and that the course will become the beginning of an ongoing journey marked by respect and recognition of Indigenous peoples' lives, the richness of Indigenous cultures, and the multiple and ongoing struggles that Indigenous peoples face across the globe. One of the last readings the students do is Krenak's small, yet deeply inspiring and poetic book, *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World* (2020). With this reading, we call for the students' recognition of how we, as a species or as global people, must look to Indigenous peoples and embrace our shared humanity if we are to have a chance at surviving the challenges of the Anthropocene and the ecocide driven by the very practices that also dispossessed Indigenous people. Krenak (2020, p. 69) writes in the final paragraph of his book:

> For those visited by these wayfarers [European adventurers and colonists], the world ended in the sixteenth century. I'm not exonerating anyone from blame, or relativizing the gravity and brutality of the machine that drove the European conquest. I'm merely pointing out that the events that ensued were the great disaster of that time, much as the conjuncture of factors labelled the Anthropocene by a selected few is the disaster of ours. For most of us, however, that abyss goes by other names – social chaos, generalized misgovernment, loss of quality of life, degraded relationships – and it's swallowing us whole.

Drawing on the popularity of Rudyard Kipling's 'Lest we forget' – today, an Australian trope used as a symbol of commemoration of the service and sacrifice of those who served the modern nation in wars and conflicts – we ask the students to scale their memory of dispossession, disruption, death and disaster away from the soldiers of the world wars and to the earlier wars and the wars that are still going in the name of 'progress' and 'modernity'. We encourage them to retain at the forefront of their practice a commitment to diversity, recognition, respect and equity, to never forget the blood on which our nations were built, to call out injustice and the legacies of colonialism; to recognise the power and resilience of Indigenous peoples across the world and remember, as Krenak suggests, the powers of dreaming. Dreaming, Krenak (2020, p. 52) explains, is 'a practice that is perceived in so many different cultures, by so many different peoples, not merely as part of the daily experience of sleeping and dreaming, but as the disciplined exercise of deriving guidance for our actions in the waking world from the dreams that visit us in our slumber'. Dreaming is more than an oneiric experience, it is 'a discipline related to our formation, to our cosmovision, to the traditions of different peoples who approach dreams as a path toward learning, self-knowledge, and awareness of life, and the application of that knowledge in our interaction with the world and other people' (Krenak 2020, p. 53).

Limitations and constraints

The FutureLearn platform offers a number of challenges and opportunities for facilitating the sort of decolonial pedagogical approach we outlined above. Each week students are taken through approximately twenty steps or screens that comprise the week's curriculum. These steps usually include some combination of an introduction, short lecture videos, interviews with guests, and case studies of Indigenous-led activism. Each step provides an opportunity for students to reflect and respond to prompts that guide the focus of each step's comment thread. In addition to the pre-designed steps, the course instructor adds further commentary to prompt discussion and build links to current events.

A first challenge in implementing the approach outlined above emerged when setting up the layout of the course in the online environment. Finding public domain imagery to support the learning proved challenging as images of Indigeneity were often stereotypical, speaking to tropes of authenticity and not representative of Indigenous peoples today. Even beyond person-focussed photography there were myriad ethical challenges to navigate. Objects and artwork hosted on the web were typically not accompanied by contextual descriptors, so we were unsure if we would be (mis)appropriating objects of spiritual significance if they were used to support the learning content. Furthermore, while archival institutions such as the British Museum collect vast visual material relating and belonging to Indigenous peoples, which are published on their websites, these images can present multiple problems: in the main, these items were taken from their traditional owners without permission and shipped outside their places of origin to be displayed without context in the metropole. While we recognise museum exhibitions and displays are increasingly moving towards critical representations of empire and the role of the museum in upholding the imperial project (Giblin, Ramos & Grout 2019), we must be careful not to uncritically reproduce de-historicised and de-contextualised objects. These issues point to a first critique or limitation of what one is actually possible to do within the neoliberal university when seeking to decolonise the curriculum: whereas the search for images could have been replaced by a collaboration with Indigenous peoples around how to represent Indigeneity as a global theme, as well as particular Indigenous groups, time constraints and a limited development budget discouraged such collaboration and practice.

Another limitation is evident in the continuing reliance on written culture and modes of communication. Whilst we embed multiple modes of storytelling in the course material, including a strong emphasis on oral communication through video and audio files, written language remains at the core of the learning material and pedagogy. The reliance on the multiple comment threads for the course's primary mode of communication and engagement with students leads to a particular focus on language and representation. Notwithstanding the difficulties inherent with tone and measure when engaging in online discussion and disagreement, there is an added opportunity to slowly and carefully attend to the way students utilise language in order to analyse presumptions and discourse. While conversations in the traditional classroom tend to move quickly with student contributions unevenly taken up and segues leading to new territory, the multi-step process which features separate commentary spaces allows for students to focus on concepts, ideas and practices as discreet entities before analysing them in concert towards the end of the unit. As a result, students can slow the pace of their learning to ask questions, but also to share and reflect on their understanding and lived experiences of these concepts.

Additionally, by creating a conversation between the prepared content and the live, but delayed, conversation in the comments it is possible to build a second narrative that runs throughout the comments section and that drives critical engagement with the more static sections of each unit. For example, in the first week's course content students are introduced to a lesson on language and terms which directs students to the Australian Human Rights Commission as the framework for best practices. As the course is offered through an Australian public university, Askland and Kilmister decided to use the Commission's guidelines to inform the design of the course, illustrating how, despite our emphasis on decolonial pedagogy, the Australian state remains centralised. The guideline led to the decision *not* to capitalise 'Indigenous' throughout all the course material (though distinct Indigenous ethno-linguistic groups – such as, for example, Māori, Maasai, San, Sami, Inui, Tikúna, Krenak, Ainu – are capitalised). However, one student quickly inquired in the comments as to why the word Indigenous had not been capitalised as they believed it should be. This created a broader conversation about course formalities and

limitations, and our ability to simultaneously subvert them. In response to the student's question, Irwin explained that while the content offered in each step would follow the Commission's guidance, the comments would operate differently as she would capitalise Indigenous in the comments. This offered the broader opportunity to talk with students about the limitations of deferring to the guidance from the Australian state as a settler colonial authority and instead encouraged students to reflect on how they too might seek out practices that centre Indigenous peoples, instead. As we see in this exchange the online platform established a necessary and reflexive transparency between instructor and student that opened up the pathway for critical engagement with the legacies of knowledge production within the academe and the broader institutions of the colonial and post-colonial state. However, this interaction demands a larger set of reflections and returns us to the very critiques levelled by scholars and activists who have sought to call out state-based rights frameworks for perpetuating imperial forms of dispossession in the name of protection and provisioning (see, for example: Moreton-Robinson 2015; Irwin 2020).

The challenges described above emerged at the stage of design and it was when we first came into a dialogue with the students that we were able to settle with our 'resolution' around representation and language. A third issue of this kind is linked to the assessment portfolio. When developing the assessment regime, a key challenge was to ensure the task remained true to decolonial values. As outlined above, the students are challenged to develop an advocacy campaign as part of their semester-long case study of an Indigenous group or struggle. Here, we quickly identified an easy slippage that sees the reference of the Indigenous groups as the 'student's people', or 'your people' and 'my people'. This short-hand reference to the case studies is deeply problematic and is an example of how colonial violence is reproduced through everyday linguistic terms, seemingly benevolent but filled with connotations to past and present trauma linked to colonial structures of violence and power. Linked to this, is the case studies' potential to move into a modernist development discourse that perpetuates imperialist ideals of progress and 'rescue' (from underdevelopment or from structures of domination and control). An important part of the instructions that the students receive about the assessment portfolio is that they are not to 'talk for' the Indigenous group. Rather, it is emphasised that the advocacy campaign is situated within the idea of social justice; it is within the space of social justice that the students are to be active and their task is to identify and activate the significant social justice issue embedded in the case they focus on. The students are to research issues that are lived realities of Indigenous people and, through this, stand with these communities. Thus, the key question becomes: what are the key justice issues that the Indigenous groups are articulating claims for and how do they organise around it. The students' task is to amplify what is already done and to, as TallBear (2014) states, 'speak in concert' with them and find pathways to channel the already articulated demands for justice.

An ongoing process of learning: Creating iterative, lateral learning spaces

For us, these examples are at the same time indicative of the limitations for decolonialisation when driven by those of us representing dominant culture and working within institutions such as the university, and a guide for what decolonisation may look like in the context of a predominantly white university and implemented by white scholars.

First, it indicates that decolonisation is, as decoloniality (Mignolo & Walsh 2018, p. 17), not a static condition: it is iterative and ongoing, evolving with and through the voices of the classroom. We have to succinctly recognise our own positionality, engage with our whiteness and our privilege, and recognise the limitations of our practice and the constraints of our actions. We must speak to the limitations of what we can do; by exposing the limitations, we can give

space for Indigenous voices and experiences. For this, the curriculum and the learning platform must be open and flexible so as to enable an ever-expanding field of voices, which broadens who we speak with and who we listen to. We have to work with parallel timeframes where the short-term deadlines of the university are countered by an expansive timeframe driven by a long-term objective to advance collaboration guided by Indigenous people.

Second, it emphasises the political work of our teaching and the need for us to show through our pedagogical practice the theory of decoloniality: we must practice what we preach. We must highlight to the students how the state seeps into our daily practice, in the classroom, in how we got to work, in how we find housing, and in all the components that set up measures and rules for societal participation and belonging. We must adopt the tools by which to make visible the invisible injustices hiding in the Western narrative of progress and advancement, and we have to give the students the tools to recognise what is marginalised and omitted.

Third, it exposes a particular approach – or definition of – decolonisation: decolonisation is a networked, solidarity based political practice. No-one can decolonise in isolation; decolonisation requires solidarity and relationships. These relationships are both within and beyond the classroom. Central for curriculum are the relationships that take us beyond the university's traditional epistemological and ontological homes; central to the pedagogy are the relationships with students. A decolonial classroom is a lateral space filled with multiple voices; it is a classroom centred on respect, recognition, reverence and collaborative learning. This also removes our position as knowledge holders and emphasises how we, as educators, are engaged in a process that goes beyond teaching – we are engaged in a space learning *with* those whose stories emerge through the curricula and, not least, with the students.

In the end, we have arrived at a conclusion of our own decolonial practice as being a matter of creating a lateral learning environment that engages with a justice-centred curriculum. Our call for action, for activism, for activation is a call for justice through a decolonial framework in which we face our own agency and our own culpability.

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