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BACHELOR OF LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

SENIOR PROJECT

**Unveiling Voices: The Importance of Student
Initiatives on Decolonization: A Case Study at
University College Roosevelt**
A Participatory Action Research

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Acknowledgment

Among several thank you and appreciation I will write in this section; I want to take the time to self-reflect and assert that decolonization is not a metaphor, and it is an ongoing process, and it continues as long as oppression continues.

I would like to thank my parents, Mamu and Buwa for their love and support.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the role of student-led initiatives in promoting decolonial aesthetics in higher education, focusing on the Netherlands and University College Roosevelt (UCR). It investigates how student movements and initiatives fostered decolonial transformation within academic institutions. By researching worldwide decolonial movements and incorporating personal anecdotes from my Participatory Action Research at UCR, the thesis highlighted the potential for student-led initiatives to contribute to decolonial practices. The findings emphasized the importance of collaboration between educators and students in reshaping curricula and creating inclusive and decolonial learning environments. Furthermore, it underscored the need for classrooms to promote decolonial transformation. Overall, the study stressed the key role of students in dismantling colonial structures of power.

Introduction

In recent years, the discourse surrounding decolonization in education has gained significant attention as scholars and activists alike seek to address the enduring legacies of colonialism within academic institutions. Decolonization, defined as the process of healing of colonial wounds has become a central focus in efforts to create more equitable and inclusive spaces within and outside academic spaces (Mignolo & Vazquez, 2013). One needs to question where do students come in the midst of all these decolonial processes. The inclusion of student voices in decolonial projects has become a central question in the discourse surrounding education. Within this context, students' voices have emerged as crucial agents of change who are seen as the drivers of conversations and actions toward decolonial transformation.

Throughout history, students have been the key instigators in driving social and political change. In the context of decolonization, it is evident that students have been instrumental in challenging colonial legacies. From the occupation of the University of Amsterdam in 2014 and 2015 to protests in South Africa such as the #RhodesMustFallMovement, students have been central in demanding decolonial changes in academic spaces. There exists a wide pool of current literature exploring the intersections of decolonization and education. For instance, scholars like Connell, Mignolo, Said, Bhabha, Chen, and Alatas have emphasized how epistemologies, knowledge systems, theories, and research are still predominantly influenced by Northern, Western, and Neoliberal theories (Manathunga, 2018). Despite this growing attention to decolonization theories, significant gaps remain in the literature, including limited empirical research on understanding the agency and importance of student voices in decolonial projects (Maine & Wagner, 2021).

The core of this paper seeks to address the following questions: What is the role and importance of student initiatives/voices in decolonization processes at University College Roosevelt (UCR)? And what is the significance of classrooms in fostering the project of decolonization? Exploring these questions, this paper will provide insights into the importance of student voices in understanding their role in decolonial projects. Drawing on Participatory Action Research (PAR), this study involved my engagement as a student, researcher, and active member of the student body at UCR, initiating various events, focus groups, and lectures to encourage decolonization processes. Additionally, interviews with professors at UCR and scholars in the Netherlands were incorporated to examine the potential of classrooms in fostering decolonial projects.

The structure of the research paper will be as follows. First, the methodological section will provide an overview of the methodological strategies employed throughout the research. Different tables and charts will be utilized to illustrate the application of different methods and Participatory Action Research (PAR). Chapter 1 will introduce the concept of decolonization, highlighting its diverse definitions across different fields, as well as perspectives from professors at UCR and scholars in the Netherlands. Delving deeper into the discussion, Chapter 2, will explore decolonial aesthetics and efforts in the Netherlands, with a specific focus on initiatives at UCR. Additionally, it will examine the PAR conducted at UCR over four months. This chapter will incorporate the findings of how UCR students bring diverse perspectives and insights that can enrich the learning experience and challenge the traditional power dynamic in academia where learning is seen as a top-down approach. This raises important questions for future research, such as exploring what it would look like for professors to share some power with students in curriculum development and how this collaboration could be navigated. Lastly, Chapter 3 examines the significance of classrooms as crucial spaces for nurturing decolonial ideas and projects. It will discuss how classrooms can serve as platforms

for fostering decolonial transformation. While some scholars like Bell Hooks (1989) argue that classrooms are sites for revolutionary changes where radical openness is exercised, Chapter 3 of this paper suggests that achieving a state of radical openness requires a foundation of creating safe and brave spaces. These spaces ensure that students feel empowered to engage in dialogue and challenge dominant narratives without prejudice. These findings underscore the importance of centering student voices and creating safe and brave spaces that foster decolonial transformation.

With an emphasis on student initiatives and decolonization efforts, these organized chapters will offer an in-depth examination of the research topic and insights into UCR's student-led initiatives. In the course of this study, I will argue that it is critical to establish spaces in classrooms where students feel free to express their ideas and criticize colonial structures. I argue that academic institutions should adopt a more decolonial strategy where students actively shape education and confront colonial legacies, rather than just adhering to a top-down hierarchical system.

Positionality: My Personal, Decolonial, and Real Introduction to My Project (Optional but Necessary)

Dear Reader,

I want to do something many other scholars have been doing in academia. It takes an unconventional form of writing and introducing one's topic of interest. Here, I write in a way how I feel. I use expressions and feelings to explain my interest and motivation. In this section, I want to be true to myself. I do not care about academic restrictions. This part of the paper is for me as a researcher and a student to express my voice.

This is what decolonization means to me. Being able to express without restrictions. Without any fear.

I was born and raised in Nepal and was introduced early on to gender inequality and witnessed gender-race disadvantage. Although I had lived comfortably within the confines of my cultural community, upon my arrival in the Netherlands in August of 2021, I was confronted with the harsh reality of racism and discrimination both within the classroom and in the border community of Middelburg. I have expressed an experience through the words of poetry which can be found only in this section of the paper. As a queer person of color, these experiences fueled a growing sense of anger and resentment towards those perpetuating such injustices, particularly towards *yt* individuals.

This made me question: Why me? What have I done wrong to you (*Yt people*)

for you to treat me like this.

As I near completion of my research, I am realizing that this anger was compounded by a sense of envy, as I yearned for the freedom to exist without fear, a privilege seemingly exclusive to them (*yt people*). I express my anger through poetry:

It is not only anger I have against *yt* people,

but it is also envy,

it is jealousy,

it is an interesting emotion that combines frustration, jealousy, and envy,

I am envious because I cannot be like them,

I cannot have things like them,

I do not inherit the same privilege as they do as I step out of my home feeling insecure that I might get harassed by Dutch teens on my way to class.

I am jealous because *yt* people do not experience institutional and racial discrimination as my people do,

This internal turmoil left me grappling with the question of how to channel such intense emotions constructively.

My journey towards exploring decolonization was further enriched during a semester at University College Utrecht, where I had the opportunity to engage with a diverse community of professors and students. The environment provided me with the platform to delve deeper into my passion for understanding the reason behind systematic inequalities and racism, through all these experiences, I found a natural alignment between my interests and principles of decolonization, which drove me to pursue further research in this field. Being inspired by professors such as Dr. Gerard van De Ree and Dr. Markha Valenta, my interest in this topic stems from the deep desire to bring decolonial changes at my university, albeit on a small scale.

Similarly, Dr Markha's students: Vicky Pinheiro Keulers and Gina Meimaan have been an inspiring model for writing this thesis.

And this topic has become more and more relevant with recent encampments and initiatives led by students across the world in support of Palestine. My support and love extend to all these brave and beautiful souls as I write this paper. You all have been inspiring.

As I now welcome the readers into my research, I invite you to think along the argument that decolonization is neither a trend nor a metaphor. Instead, it is an ongoing process that requires continuous efforts and resistance against the colonial structure.

Free Palestine

Methodology

In this paper, I used qualitative methodology to explore how educational institutions, particularly, UCR approach decolonization. Simultaneously, it explored how student initiatives strive for decolonization. In the initial stage of this paper, I carried out preliminary research focused on decolonization. The “Decolonizing UCU” report by Vicky Pinheiro, Gina Meimaan, Anne Schuurmans, and Harry Mills under the guidance of Dr. Markha’s course was particularly instrumental for this project. Following the preliminary research, I formulated my plans for Participatory Action Research (PAR). My paper aimed to understand the diverging manners in which student initiatives and their voices play a significant role in decolonial approaches. Qualitative methodology was useful to gain an inner and lived understanding of how these student initiatives advocate for decolonization. The aim of using this methodology was not to generalize or replicate results. Instead, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which decolonization processes take place at UCR. This methodology was advantageous in this paper because it allowed for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon. Furthermore, my decision to focus on the Netherlands, particularly UCR, is based on my familiarity with the institution as my home university. UCR, as a small Liberal Arts university, offers a unique framework for this research, allowing me to use my numerous responsibilities as a researcher, student activist, and member of student governance bodies to thoroughly investigate this topic.

Roles

Throughout this research, it is important to clarify the multiple roles I held to provide context. At UCR, I served as the Chair of the UCR Council¹ from August 2023 to June 2024, actively participating in student governance. Additionally, I was a member of the student body, contributing to the AAC². However, employing Participatory Action Research means that I am also engaged in utilizing research to enact positive changes, leveraging the position and influence I hold in the community.

During the research, navigating these diverse roles has presented challenges. Nonetheless, these roles have also provided valuable opportunities. By wearing multiple hats, I have been able to effectively convey student concerns, utilizing the data gathered to advocate for necessary changes within the university administration.

Sample, Sampling, and Key Participants

The participants in this research were chosen using purposive sampling, as they needed to meet specific criteria to provide insights relevant to the research objectives. This sampling technique was deemed suitable for this paper because it allowed the researcher to select individuals with characteristics that were of particular interest and well-suited to address the research question (Harding, 2019). One of the aims of the research was to explore the

¹ The UCR Council is one of UCR's co-governance bodies (next to the UCR Program Committee) and represents the interests of UCR's students, faculty and staff members. Its advisory and approval rights are similar to those of a Faculty Council and laid down in the UCR Rules and Regulations which follow the provisions of the Dutch law on higher education and research (WHW). The Council discusses UCR's policy development regarding the educational program and its support structures, finances, human resources, facilities, and communication and recruitment with the Executive Board. (See: <https://www.ucr.nl/about-ucr/governance/council/>)

² AAC is the student board and represents UCR students in academic matters. AAC functions as an intermediary between students and UCR. AAC is involved in safeguarding the quality of education and advocates for students' views.

perspectives of professors from various departments at UCR regarding the importance of student initiatives and simultaneously their view on decolonizing higher education. The motivation to interview professors was inspired by a study conducted at our sister university, UCU, where they interviewed professors and obtained interesting results. As a result, I conducted interviews with professors at UCR to further explore these themes and gain insights into our university. Furthermore, some participants were selected through voluntary sampling, where I reached out to scholars in the Netherlands via email to request interviews.

Data Collection and Procedure

This research applied a case study design using participatory action research. PAR is defined as a collaborative research approach between a community with a lived experience of social issues and a researcher (Lenette, 2022, p. 5). PAR aims to work with the community to understand and improve the world by changing it (Cornish et al., 2023). Lenette (2022) argues Participatory Action Research offers a wide range of possibilities while selecting methods for researchers. In this paper, my main data collection methods chosen were interviews and focus groups. I have chosen Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the most suitable approach for my research due to its significant social and political potential to initiate changes within University College Roosevelt. In essence, it offers an effective tool for decolonization, allowing me to reimagine research as a non-hierarchical process of teaching, learning, and knowledge production (Lenette, 2022).

According to Harding (2019), interviews allow the researchers to cover sensitive subjects and gain perspectives by examining their feelings and perceptions. Furthermore, qualitative interviews have the advantages of being flexible and adaptable. During the research, and interview procedure, participants were contacted through email.

In particular, semi-structured interviews were selected as the interview technique. They enable thorough investigation and detailed accounts of the perspectives and experiences of the interviewees (Kakilla, 2021). As per Mashuri et al. (2022), this approach functions as a mechanism for uncovering information and acquiring perspectives via informal talks and exchanges. Additionally, this interviewing style is helpful since it provides the researcher the freedom to discuss a range of issues with participants who have different backgrounds (Mashuri et al., 2022). Finally, the interviews had a duration ranging from thirty to fifty minutes. I conducted six interviews, including two scholars from the Netherlands and four faculty members at UCR.

Likewise, a focus group, according to Santhosh et al. (2021) refers to a way of collecting qualitative data that involves a small number of people focused on a specific topic or issue. In the context of my research, focus group discussion revolved around themes of Gender, Race, and Diversity. The purpose of these focus groups was to compile comprehensive lists of demands and propose potential solutions to identified issues. These sessions also aimed to provide platforms for students to voice their concerns and issues related to decolonization. Moreover, these focus groups were publicized through various UCR communication channels, including the AAC and RASA (Roosevelt All Student Association) newsletters, Instagram posts, and WhatsApp messages.

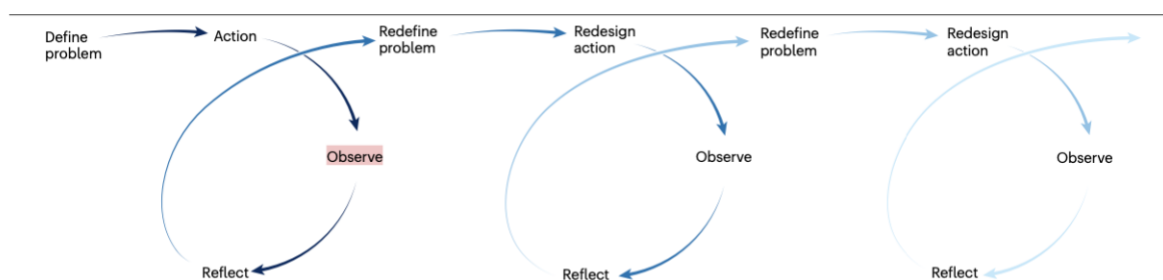


Fig. 1 | Participatory action research cycles. Participatory action research develops through a series of cycles, with relationship building as a constant practice. Cycles of research text adapted from ref. 81, and figure adapted with permission from ref. 82, SAGE.

Figure 1

Similarly, figure 1 presented in Cornish et al.'s (2023) article illustrates one of the potential processes of Participatory Action Research (PAR). This process involves a continuous loop of steps, which includes defining the problem, observing, taking action, reflecting on the outcomes, and then returning to the beginning by redefining the problem. It exemplifies an iterative approach where the problems are identified and then re-identified as well as the generation of measures and solutions, are ongoing and interconnected. PAR thus represents a dynamic and cyclical method for addressing issues and promoting change.

In brief, data collection involved documentation of meetings and activities: attendances, workshop/lecture, focus group minutes, discussion outputs, reflective notes, and in-depth interviews with 4 UCR faculty members and 2 scholars from the Netherlands. I analyzed the processed data using thematic analysis and triangulation.

Instrument of Data collection and Data Analysis Method

An interview guide was utilized that comprised a series of open-ended questions and probing inquiries designed to capture interviewees' perspectives. Despite the fact that interviews by their very nature provide a subjective portrayal of people's experiences, they are a good fit for this research because it seeks to comprehend individual narratives and opinions. The interviews were divided into different sections: Perceptions of Student Initiatives, Personal involvement, Challenges and Concerns, and Collaboration between students and faculty.

To analyze the data, I employed thematic analysis that involved identifying various codes within the data set and then organizing them into overarching themes. These themes were derived from the interview data which will be connected back to the existing literature to procedure further context.

For the focus groups, I requested a member of the AAC to take minutes/ notes to keep a record of the discussion. Given the unexpectedly large number of participants, using a voice recorder to track the conversation proved challenging. Taking minutes allowed a thorough documentation of the discussions and ensured that the insights and points raised by the participants were captured accurately.

PAR in Practice

The research approach I have adopted was significantly influenced by the working mechanism of the UCU Diversity Committee. During my inter-UC exchange, I attended various events and engaged with members of the Diversity Committee in Utrecht. Their approach to addressing diversity-related themes served as a valuable model for my research approach.

The Diversity Committee's approach consists of three main phases where they create a theme of discussion for every month (University College Utrecht, n.d.):

1. **Public Meeting:** This phase involves a public meeting where individuals share their personal experiences and insights related to the diversity theme of the month. The primary purpose of this meeting is to foster sharing and active listening.
2. **Interventions Round Table:** Following the public meeting, the committee hosts an "interventions" round table. This is a public follow-up meeting where anyone with concrete interventions, suggestions, or ideas related to the monthly theme can participate. Input from the community is gathered, and comprehensive notes are taken.
3. **Harvest Session:** In the final phase, the Diversity Committee members meet for a harvest session where they review all the notes and inputs collected from the public meetings. The aim is to determine how to address each of the identified needs and which stakeholders in the institutions can contribute to meeting those needs.

I adopted a similar structure in organizing events related to decolonization. My approach will consist of three key components where each month will be dedicated to one theme or topic such as Gender, Race, Diversity, and Inclusion³. The PAR process comprised three stages, each with interactive activities, focus groups, and reflection/ meetings. Figure 3 illustrates a tabular illustration of the plan that I implemented. In the upcoming section, Figure 3 will elucidate how I implemented these initiatives through various events.

	STAGES	DESCRIPTION
1	OPEN DISCUSSION/FOCUS GROUPS	Open discussions and Focus Groups were organised where participants can openly share their experiences and perspectives related to decolonization. This meeting served as a platform for sharing and listening
2	OUTWARD FACING DECOLONISATION	A series of guest lectures or workshops were organised by inviting scholars and professors from Utrecht University. The aim is to bring external perspectives and insights at UCR.
3	HARVEST SESSION	A Harvest Session involves I, along with other stakeholders such as the student bodies and initiated reviewing the notes and inputs collected from the open discussion and focus groups. The suggestions are reviewed and determine how to implement them effectively to bring about positive changes related to decolonization and diversity

Figure 2

Ethical Considerations

Throughout this paper and the interview process, I aimed to remain attentive to potential ethical considerations and implemented specific strategies to address them. Prior to each focus group and interview, I obtained informed consent from participants and assured them of the confidentiality of their responses to ensure a comfortable environment during and after the

³ The rationale behind selecting these specific theme stems from my personal understanding of decolonization and the belief that these themes are connected to the larger processes of decolonization. Therefore, this decision is subjective and rooted in personal belief.

interview. Furthermore, for participants who chose to be anonymous, I recognized the importance of safeguarding their identities by using pseudonyms and removed any information from the transcript that would make them identifiable. I made sure to provide clear explanations of the interviews and focus groups' nature to participants to ensure their full understanding to obtain competent consent. All these measures were crucial for upholding ethical standards and ensuring ethical conduct throughout the research.

Vulnerability and Positionality

Lenette (2022, pp. 1–37) points out one of the important aspects of PAR, which is vulnerability during the research process. Vulnerability, defined by Lenette (2022, pp.1-37), refers to the emotional and psychological impact on academic researchers when they engage with and write about challenging social, cultural, and political issues. This impact can manifest in researchers as feelings of distress, helplessness, confusion, or even humiliation arising from the research. This vulnerability occurs because of the nature of the research as it involves interacting with and challenging power dynamics, consequently increasing the risks and vulnerabilities faced by researchers. However, it is essential to recognize that this vulnerability can also serve as a source of strength for the researcher and the wider population. Researchers can use their personal experiences to communicate with individuals passionate about these topics, offering guidance and insights for the future. Furthermore, it is critical to understand that the process of decolonization is gradual and demands continuous effort and persistence.

Likewise, carrying out this research has required me to make significant sacrifices in various aspects of my student life at UCR. While I am passionate about the topic and driven to make a meaningful impact at my university, I have come to an understanding that this comes with a cost. The physical and emotional energy demanded by this project is substantial and it is challenging to balance it with other responsibilities. At the same time, the behind-the-scenes

work involved in carrying out this research goes beyond what is apparent in the paper. I have realized that Emotional Management is an essential part of this process because juggling academics, research projects, and personal life is challenging. The amount of time and energy I initially estimated I would spend on this preparing for focus groups, hosting events, and striving to bring changes within institutions is an inherently stressful and demanding process that I greatly underestimated. One of the most significant sacrifices has been in the case of the time I would have spent socializing with family and friends. After numerous events and meetings, I often found myself too exhausted to engage in other activities, making it difficult to maintain a research-life balance.

Despite the challenges and sacrifices, I find a sense of fulfillment in working toward a positive change at the university. Decolonization is a gradual and slow process that requires patience and persistence, and I am dedicated and committed to contributing to this essential journey.

Limitations

While there are notable advantages to using focus groups as a research method, it is important to acknowledge that they also come with certain disadvantages. In the case of focus groups, there is a possibility that participants may take the initiative to set the agenda, potentially diverting the discussion away from the intended topic of the focus group. Smithson (2000) refers to as the dominant voice in focus groups. Additionally, when a single researcher is responsible for conducting the research, it can introduce various challenges, including the researcher having a dual role (Harding, 2019). For example, the researcher needs to facilitate and moderate the discussion while simultaneously taking effective notes. This dual role may lead to omission or misinterpretation of certain issues (John Hopkins University, n.d.).

Simultaneously, the research conducted is based on UCR, and the findings are applicable only at UCR. Therefore, the research lacks replicability. However, it is imperative to note that the purpose of carrying out participatory action research (PAR) is not to generate information and knowledge that ensures replicability and generalizability, but rather to generate knowledge through actions by working with the community, as Lenette (2022) emphasizes. This is something that I recognized while carrying out the research—that my goal is not to create replicable research but to ensure that I use research tools that are aimed at challenging the colonial system.

In addition, living in a close-knit community like UCR increases the likelihood of my close friends participating in my events. Additionally, some of the professors who responded to my emails for an interview were familiar with me as I have taken their course. Thus, affecting the objectivity of the research. Likewise, I would like to acknowledge that conducting this research required me to wear multiple hats. This research holds personal significance for me, and I have advocated for related to my project such as EDI in other roles such as the Council and AAC. This personal involvement impacts the objectivity of the research as it is challenging to remain completely impartial when researching topics in which I am personally invested.

Another important aspect is that balancing multiple roles in my research has been confusing. As a representative of the UCR Council and the AAC, I am tasked with representing both student and institutional interests. However, as a researcher and student, my goal is to challenge the existing structures and foster change. This duality of my role sometimes created confusion and conflict of interest and has required careful navigation to ensure my actions align with both my institutional responsibility and my research objectives.

Methods in Practice

September (Gender and Race Awareness Month)

Open Discussion -1 (Gender and Race)

The first open discussion focused on the topic of Gender and Race which took place on September 12, 2023. I promoted this event across various UCR communication channels, including RASA (Roosevelt All Student Organization), AAC, UCR newsletters, Instagram posts, stories, and WhatsApp messages. Surprisingly, there was a turnout of 35 participants.

The open discussion began with an introduction to my research topic on decolonization and the reasons behind my pursuit of this paper. It was emphasized that this was an open and safe space for discussion. To set the stage, I provided a brief explanation of key concepts like decolonization and the definition of gender and race. The session kicked off with an engaging activity, encouraging participants to contemplate and share their perspectives on the meanings of Gender and Race, and how these aspects influence us as individuals in university spaces such as classrooms.

Some sample of the questions used during the open discussion involve:

1. How do you think race and gender impact the overall university experience for students?
2. Have you personally experienced or witnessed instances of racial or gender bias on campus? How did it affect you or others?
3. In what ways can universities promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in both academic and social settings?

Guest Lecture-1

Following the first Open Discussion, I organized the first guest lecture by Dr. Gerard Van De Ree on September 14th, 2023. I met Dr. van De Ree during my inter-UC Exchange at UCU. I express my gratitude to them for dedicating their time to deliver this lecture at UCR. The lecture, titled *Queering Power: thinking across coloniality, gender, and human nature relations* delved into the intricate dynamics of power relations within the context of gender, emphasizing the significance of having allies in the pursuit of gender equality. This lecture also provided a framework to understand Gender and Sexual roles in a deconstructed and decolonized manner.

A sign-up link was attached to the posters for interested participants to attend. A total of 52 students registered for this lecture. The lecture was advertised through all UCR communication channels.

The primary objective of this guest lecture was to foster outward-facing decolonization,⁴ extending knowledge and awareness beyond the confines of academia and into the broader community (Shahjahan *et al.*, 2021). It aimed to contribute to the ongoing discourse on decolonization, gender, and human nature relations, promoting a more inclusive and equitable understanding of these topics.

Focus Group: 1 (Gender and Race)

Following the first open discussion, a focus group was organized on Wednesday, September 20th. I received valuable assistance from my AAC (Academic Affairs Council) members, who helped to take notes of this meeting. The primary objective of this focus group

⁴ Strategies that adopt an outward-facing approach advocate for initiatives that extend beyond the confines of academic institutions, the one that aims to engage with external communities and address broader social-political concerns (Shahjahan *et al.* 2021)

was to address the issues raised during the open discussion and explore potential student-led solutions to tackle these problems.

The focus group began with an introduction to my project on decoloniality and the request for participants' consent to ensure that the anonymity of the participants would be maintained. The discussion during the focus group revolved around the three primary themes that emerged from the first open discussion on Gender and Race.

1. The importance of acknowledging and using correct gender pronouns by faculty members
2. The need for equity, diversity, and inclusion in curriculum format and content.
3. The gap between the decision-making body and Students at UCR

During this focus group, approximately seven students participated, and the main focus was on brainstorming and discussing potential solutions to the identified problems.

October (Diversity and Inclusion Month)

Open Discussion- 2 (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion)

Similarly, I held an Open Discussion on the topic related to EDI as it was a prevalent topic at UCR because the Dean had decided to "dissolve the EDI committee." Similarly, I organized a second Open Discussion focusing on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).

The Open discussion was held on October 3rd, 2023. It was advertised in the same manner as it was done for the Gender and Race Open Discussion. Impressively, there were 35 participants in the event and the Dean himself was present. I was again fortunate to have the support of one of my AAC members who assisted in typing the minutes.

The central theme of the discussion involved introducing my research project and soliciting the views and opinions of the participants. The primary objective was to understand the student perspective on EDI and capture the importance of EDI-related issues at UCR. This dialogue aimed to collect data regarding why EDI matters at UCR and to underscore the necessity for it. This discussion also allowed the Dean to explain the reasoning behind his decision on the dissolution of the EDI committee at UCR. This Open discussion generated tension between the students and the Dean, primarily due to the student's frustration with the actions taken by the Dean regarding EDI matters. Nevertheless, amidst the tension, there were several constructive ideas and suggestions discussed that ultimately led to a significant outcome. The Dean agreed to establish a new EDI committee. This decision marked a positive step in addressing EDI concerns with the UCR community. The outcomes of these discussions and the steps taken to address the issues will be elaborated upon in the findings section of the thesis.

Workshop- 1 (EDI- October)

On October 27th, 2023, I hosted an (EDI) workshop, drawing from the training I received from the UU EDI committee during my inter-UC exchange at UCU. I invited trainers from Utrecht Universities who took part in the training with me.

The EDI workshop was structured to focus on three key aspects:

1. **Understanding Diversity & Inclusion:** Over the course of this 90-minute session, the workshop aims to give a comprehensive understanding of the concepts of Diversity and Inclusion. In the end, they could differentiate between the two.

2. **Creating Inclusive Environments:** Practical strategies were shared to help foster a more inclusive academic environment. The goal was to make our university a welcoming place for all.
3. **Broadening Your Perspective:** Attendees are left with the ability to view the world through a comprehensive, cross-sectional lens, appreciating the rich tapestry of identities within our diverse community.

The workshop had 30 attendees. The primary aim was to raise awareness about these critical topics and inspire a culture of inclusivity at our university.

Harvest Session

Weekly meeting with Student Initiatives and Working on EDI and

Following the Open Discussion on EDI, it became evident that the Dean was inclined to establish a new EDI committee with clearly defined goals and strategies to implement effective changes related to diversity and inclusion within the UCR community. These developments marked a positive shift in addressing EDI concerns. In collaboration with the student initiatives, we collectively drafted a proposal for the new EDI committee, which was subsequently presented to the Dean and was accepted.

PAR in UCR

September Gender and Race

1. Open Discussion
2. Lecture: "Queering Power: Thinking Across Coloniality, gender, and human-nature Relations by Dr. Gerard Van De Ree" (Utrecht University)
3. Focus Group

October: Diversity

1. Open Discussion
2. EDI Workshop
3. Focus Group

November: Race and Intersectionality

1. Lecture: "Understanding the Complexities of Intersectionality: Sexuality Religion and Race" by Markha Valenta (Utrecht University)
2. Focus Group

Figure 3

Chapter 1: Decolonization in Perspective: Unraveling Definitions, Dialogues, and Distinctions

During the review of various academic works on the decolonial approach to curriculum and the precise implications of decolonization, I came across several interpretations of the term “decolonization.” It is important to note that a universal, all-encompassing explanation of the concept is elusive. Understanding these diverse interpretations is significant to gain a comprehensive grasp of the multifaceted nature of decolonization and its implications. It facilitates a more nuanced analysis of different theories and practices, enabling scholars and students to navigate the complexities. In addition, recognizing these diverse definitions promotes inclusivity and respect for varied perspectives that aim to foster a rich and inclusive dialogue within decolonial discourse. This chapter will be structured as follows: The initial section will center on examining the varied interpretations of decolonization as depicted in academic literature. This segment will delve into scholarly journals to explore the various definitions and understandings attributed to decolonization within academic discourses. Subsequently, the second section will transition to explore the varied interpretations of decolonization among the professors and academics facilitated through semi-structured interviews. Lastly, I will briefly discuss the differences between Postcolonial and Decolonial schools of thought and argue the reason why I use the decolonial framework in my paper.

Shahjahan et al., (2021) propose a definition of decolonization as the undoing of colonialism. This involves creating space for alternative perspectives by empowering, incorporating, restructuring, and merging various elements. Here, the discussion places a strong emphasis on inclusive and holistic knowledge as central themes. In contrast, Sium et al. (2012) and Tuck and Yang (2017) assert that decolonization revolves around Indigenous methods, practices, land, people, cosmologies, and the future. In this view, Indigenous

sovereignty and knowledge are at the core of the discourse, closely tying the definition of decolonization to indigenization. The rationale behind these differing definitions is effectively elucidated by (Shahjahan et al., 2021) as they examine how decolonization is conceptualized across different continents and its implications in both educational contexts and policymaking arenas.

The term “decolonization” carries different connotations and implications depending on the continent that is being discussed (Bhambra, 2014). For instance, in Northern American regions such as Canada New Zealand, and Australia, the notion of decolonization shares a close and interconnected relationship with indigenization. In this context, decolonization aims to create space for indigenous perspectives within educational institutions and government policies. This entails placing indigenous and settler knowledge on an equal footing, both in terms of content and pedagogy (Shahjahan et al., 2021). In the case of Africa, Shahjahan et al (2021) stress that decolonization involves providing room for African knowledge and identities within educational institutions. This approach emphasizes the integration of various forms of knowledge into the curriculum, without necessarily completely eradicating Eurocentric knowledge (Shahjahan et al., 2021). In contrast, in the case of Asia, decolonization involves the realignment and connection of intellectual, physical, ethical, and relational practices. It is primarily focused on reducing academic dependency on Western thought and credentials by introducing local epistemologies, intellectuals, and experiences into the educational landscape (Shahjahan et al., 2021). Therefore, this discussion surrounding the definition of decolonization highlights the absence of a singular universally accepted definition that applies to all contexts.

Simultaneously, Shahjahan et al. (2021) recognize that the concept of decolonization has evolved significantly over time. In 1853, decolonization primarily referred to the act of removing a region from its colonial status. By 1945, it had evolved to signify the attainment of

independence by nation-states from their former colonial rulers. Moving forward to 1960, the term took on a broader dimension, encompassing not just political independence but also liberation from economic dependence, exploitation, and underdevelopment (Shahjahan et al. 2021). In recent times, some scholars have introduced a novel perspective. They write about reconfiguring the global order by decentering the Eurocentric norms that have historically been imposed on the world. This evolution underscores the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the concept of decolonization.

Despite the contestations, certain prominent themes consistently emerge that provide a fundamental basis for comprehending decolonization. It is evident that decolonization can be interpreted as a transformative process to challenge and dismantle the enduring influences of colonialism. It is also essential to recognize that the definition of decolonization can be highly personal, as it depends on how one experiences and imagines colonial violence and structures. The notion that decolonization can be personal can also vary based on geographical location, personal experiences, and historical context (Bhambra, 2014).

In this paper, I have personally conceptualized decolonization as a healing process from the wounds inflicted by colonialism. This definition is largely used by scholars like Walter Mignolo (Mignolo & Vazquez, 2013). While I acknowledge that this definition is broad and may not fully encapsulate the intricate characteristics and implications of decolonization, it serves as a starting point for me, as a researcher, as it enables me to explore various dimensions of decolonization from diverse points and perspectives.

Diverse Definition Among Interviewees.

The diversity in defining decolonization is not only evident among scholarly articles that I engaged in but also emerged during my research interviews with professors and scholars

from various departments, each offering distinct interpretations of the concept. Despite this diversity, a common thread binds this carrying definition together: the fundamental idea of decolonization involves a shift away from Eurocentric perspectives and a critique of colonial ideologies. At its core, decolonization is the promotion of diverse viewpoints and the rejection of singular perspectives, particularly in curriculum development and academic discourse. For a comprehensive understanding of these diverse definitions, refer to Figure 4.

To illustrate this claim, the definition posed by Dr. Hoving and Dr. Rios Oyola succinctly captures this essence when they state:

Dr Hoving argues: It (Decolonization) is a critique but also an abolishment of all the heritage of colonial thinking.... So, all the colonial heritage should be radically addressed and radically worked through.

Dr Rios Oyola argues that Decolonization is a fuzzy concept and I think...it's the criticism of Eurocentric views and perspectives of doing knowledge. So, it's trying to revisit, the history and the ways of doing... Basically, it poses questions about the limitations and the creations of the different disciplines.

This definition by Dr Hoving and Dr Rios Oyola resonates with Shahjahan et al. (2021), who assert that decolonization involves dismantling colonialism by creating spaces to address these issues. This aligns with the broader discourse on decolonization, which recognizes the necessity of disrupting entrenched power dynamics and amplifying marginalized voices. Furthermore, Hoving's and other interviewees' definitions, underscore the transformative potential of decolonization, highlighting its capacity to challenge colonial narratives. The definition by Hoving illustrates the significance of decolonization in contemporary discourses

as it plays a role as a catalyst for decolonial transformation where colonial heritage and thinking are radically addressed. Dr. Hoving and Dr Rios Oyola's definition of decolonization presents several discussion points for this paper. For instance, questioning how colonial heritage and thinking can be radically addressed and challenged. This promotes further inquiry into the specific spaces, where can these ideas be scrutinized? Additionally, it brings up the question of who are the stakeholders in this process. All these questions will be addressed in the following chapters, where I recognize students and professors as the key stakeholders in the process of bringing about decolonial transformation. Additionally, classrooms, in this paper are identified as the space where colonial heritage is radically addressed.

Although there was a consensus among interviews regarding the essence of decolonization as a departure from the Eurocentric perspective and the promotion of diverse viewpoints, Dr Van Gent offers a thought-provoking counterpoint. He suggests that the term decolonization may serve as a form of framing, potentially alienating those who do not subscribe to its principles. Dr Van Gent offered his response as follows:

"I think it is a kind of framing because you immediately denounce anyone who wouldn't agree with this (Decolonization).... And using these terms leads to polarization and it does not help."

According to Dr. van Gent, the use of such terms could contribute to polarization and hinder productive dialogue. Simultaneously, it illustrates the potential to evoke varied reactions and interpretations among scholars and stakeholders. He explains, "*Decolonization is a term nobody's against, everybody would support it. And I am afraid that using these kinds of terms leads to polarization (...) So you're in favor of colonialism that will, it will kill any*

form or you're not creating any acceptance for other visions opinions perspective if you're using terms like this." Dr van Gent's quote puts forth his concern that the term decolonization is universally supported, but using this term could also lead to polarization. He suggests that using such terms could create a binary understanding where one is either in favor of decolonization or in favor of colonialism, leading to no room for alternative perspectives. This binary thinking, according to, Dr Van Gent, can hinder the acceptance of diverse perspectives leading to polarization and excluding certain perspectives from this discourse for those who do not fully align with the concept of decolonization. Furthermore, he fears that framing discussions in terms of decolonization, may unintentionally silence or dismiss voices that offer alternate perspectives or criticism. Thus, according to Dr Van Gent, the use of the term decolonization results in polarization within academic and social circles where individuals are compelled to align with one extreme or another rather than engaging in a nuanced discussion.

Through the literature and interviews, it has become pertinent that the term may carry different connotations for different individuals, making it essential to navigate discussions surrounding decolonization with sensitivity and nuance. Dr Van Gent's viewpoint invites us to reflect on the language and rhetoric used in discussions of decolonization which could shape perception and impact dialogue. Overall, his perspective underscores the diverse perception of the term decolonization by drawing attention to the potential implication of terminology and the importance of fostering inclusive and constructive engagement in this discourse.

The diverse definitions of decolonization provided by the professors and scholars interviewed can be found in Figure 4.

Definition of Decolonisation

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Name	Faculty	Description
Sandra Oyola	Social Sciences: Sociology (University College Roosevelt)	Decolonization is a fuzzy concept and I think...it's the criticism to Eurocentric views and perspectives of doing knowledge. So it's trying to revisit, the history and the ways of doing... Basically, it poses questions about the limitations, the creations of the different disciplines.
Tobias Van Gent	Arts and Humanities: History (University College Roosevelt)	You should have a clear eye in on all the different perspectives of historical events and different experiences... The problem I have with the term decolonization is that I find it a little bit like framing.... It's a kind of framing because you immediately denounce anyone else that wouldn't agree with this. And I am afraid that using these kinds of terms leads to polarization and it doesn't help... You should have a nuanced, open debate...
Interviewee 3	Engeneering: (University College Roosevelt)	For me, it would mean that I can also directly give examples passed from an enginneer for scientists who were not within the Western culture.
Interviewee 4	Sciences: (University College Roosevelt)	it is to sort of go away from the colonization, focus of like our successes as in our cultural background, and sort of make it more broader, like the information that students get in education is not focused on what we managed to achieve with colonization. But a more broader view, and also being honest about the past.... <i>But I mean, in my field of research, I don't really hear about it. But I do think it's important too, because I think like the social sciences are more affected by this topic.</i>
Isabel Hoving	Associate Professor at the Department of Film and Literary Studies and former Diversity Officer (Leiden University)	It has to be a critique, but also an abolishment of all the heritage of colonial thinking that is still with us in so many little details. So it's of all forms of racism, but also the white superiority. The epistemologies that are still so suffused with colonial thought... the sense of entitlement. It's all there and then it's there in the way of teaching.... the way with policy towards students is articulated, so all the colonial heritage that is still in it should be radically addressed and radically work through radically done away with.
Katrine Smiet	Metaphysics and philosophical anthropology (Radboud University)	I connect that (decolonisation) very much to student movements.... So what I think the framework of decolonising does is that it provides a much more fundamental critique than the work of diversity... Decolonization is about adding something to an existing to something that already stands firmly in place, but it's actually about saying, what is that based on and what violence or historical inequality and violence oppression is kind of at the heart of things as we know them.

Figure 4: Diverse Definition among interviewees

Decoloniality or Postcolonialism?

Within the larger decolonial discourses, there exists a wide pool of perspectives such as postcolonialism, decoloniality, and subaltern studies. While this paper will not delve into explaining the intricacies of these schools of thought, it is important to highlight the major distinctions and commonalities between decoloniality and postcolonialism. Similarly, I will offer insights into why I have chosen the decolonial approach as the primary framework for my paper. By carrying out preliminary research, I have recognized the limitations of postcolonial theory and I aim to explore the more nuanced and transformative aspects of the decolonial school of thought. This clarification is essential for discussion on decolonization as these terms are often confused or mistakenly perceived as synonymous.

The distinctions between postcolonial and decolonial schools of thought are deeply rooted in their geographical origins. Bhabra (2014) and Sousa Santos (2021) echo this argument regarding the influence of temporal and geographical contexts on these perspectives. Postcolonialism originated from scholars in the Middle East and South Asia in the 1960s, examines the enduring consequences of decolonization, highlighting economic, political, and cultural dependencies, subordination, and marginalization (Bhabra, 2014; Sousa Santos, 2021). Conversely, decolonial studies emerged from South American scholars in the 1990s that address material, socioeconomic, and cultural issues, emphasizing the enduring effects of coloniality despite political independence (Bhabra 2014; Sousa Santos, 2021).

Alongside differentiating the geographical origins of these scholars and schools of thought, their approaches to decolonial projects also vary. Postcolonialism advocates for a revitalization of non-Western ideas within the existing frameworks, while decolonial

theorists call for a complete departure from the Western paradigms, aiming to promote “delinking: and “border thinking” (Mignolo, 2007). The decolonial approach urges a radical re-evaluation of Western intellectual traditions and a departure from colonial influences (Colpani et al., 2022). Broader thinking as defined by Schulz (2017) refers to and I quote from the text “ *dwelling in the borderlands, metaphorically as well as in concrete material terms, to create new cultural and political imaginaries from a position of being in between.*” It involves a process of epistemic delinking, challenging the status quo, and moving beyond the hegemonic dominance of Western epistemological frameworks and paradigms. This approach aims to question and critique Western imperial epistemological discourses from a global and multicultural perspective (Udah, 2021).

On the other hand, Postcolonial scholars like Homi K Bhabha argue, that because of colonialism and globalization, cultures across the world have become hybrid, meaning that different cultures have become interconnected through migration and trade (Mambrol, 2016). Thus, they contend that a complete departure or delink from the West is not possible. Postcolonial scholars like Spivak puts forth the notion of unlearning as an approach to decolonization. The process of unlearning involves evaluating and introspecting one’s beliefs, prejudices, and assumptions that arise and how they become naturalized (van Oers et al., 2023). Hence, Spivak suggests that unlearning enables individuals to reflect, giving them space to look at things from alternate perspectives to see the hidden and unseen aspects and think the unthinkable (van Oers et al., 2023).

Postcolonial theory, often scrutinized for its Eurocentric perspective, differs from the more politically driven and activist decolonial interventions. Decolonial scholars argue that the postcolonial approach is still deeply linked with colonial ideologies, thus missing the entire point of carrying out decolonial projects. Prescott et al. (2018) support this argument as they

believe that placing the “post” in “postcolonialism” implies a sense of closure from the colonial past, suggesting that colonialism and its effects are over. This centralization, in their perspective, ignores the individual experiences within those cultures affected by colonialism (Prescott et al., 2018). This contrast highlights the distinct approaches and stresses the significance of acknowledging the diverse objectives and methods of each framework in addressing the legacies of colonialism and advancing decolonial praxis.

In my reflection, I view the decolonial approach as more proactive which aims to challenge and break away from existing colonial paradigms and re-evaluate how we create and interpret knowledge. Similarly, the PAR I conducted was decolonial, following a bottom-up and activist approach, where I, as a student and a researcher, engaged with the community to foster decolonial changes within UCR. By using the concept of delinking and broader thinking, I aimed to incorporate outside perspectives by inviting lecturers and hosting workshops at UCR to provide an alternative framework. In my research, I employed the concept of delinking by attempting to break away from the UCR’s understanding of education⁵ and incorporate external knowledge and expertise. Therefore, considering the limitations of postcolonial studies, this paper adopts a decolonial lens, which seeks decolonial shifts from grassroots levels. However, it is essential to emphasize that these two approaches are not necessarily in opposition. They can complement each other. Their respective strengths can be harnessed to address the substantial challenges that remain ahead to decolonize educational institutions.

⁵ I perceive UCR’s education and curriculum as very rigid, primarily focusing on academic density and adherence to strict academic rules and procedures, leaving little room for alternative approaches. This could be seen in the reluctance to explore unconventional methods such as writing in the form of poetry or engaging in alternative modes of thinking. It is important to note that this perception is based on personal experience as both a student and a researcher and is influenced by personal bias.

Conclusion

This chapter has revealed the elusive nature of defining decolonization, meaning there is not a single universally encompassing meaning of this term. This chapter proves this argument in two ways. First, it stems from the understanding that defining decolonization can be highly personal, influenced by factors such as one's geographical location, temporality, and experiences with colonial violence and structure. Second, the diverse definitions of decolonization were not limited to scholarly articles and academic discourses but were also evident in interviews conducted with four UCR faculty members from each department and two scholars from the Netherlands. Despite all these differences and nuances, there was a single thread that connected all the interviewees that decolonization involves moving away from Eurocentric perspectives and embracing diverse voices. Additionally, it was noted that the term decolonization can also polarize and hinder productive dialogue. This is mainly due to the binary understanding that arises, where one is perceived as either in favor of decolonization or in favor of colonialism, leaving no room for alternative perspectives. This diversity accentuates the need for nuanced engagement and open-mindedness in discussions about decolonization. Therefore, this paper adopts the definition of decolonization as the healing of colonial wounds, allowing for the recognition of a wide range of ideas in decolonization without claiming one definition as definitive. Lastly, this chapter delved into why this paper adopts a decolonial framework, mainly due to its activist-grassroots approach, which closely aligns with the concept of delinking as proposed by the decolonial school of thought. Moving forward, the next chapter will delve into the role of student initiatives in the decolonization process.

Chapter 2: Decolonizing Academia: The Importance of Students' Voices

Decolonial aesthetics constitutes an ongoing artistic initiative that responds to the adverse aspects of colonialism and imperial globalization, as defined by the Duke University Center for Global Studies and Humanities (n.d.). This chapter will seek to address why student voices are central to decolonial projects. First, it attempts to look into the importance of students' voices in decolonial projects, questioning the relevance of students' voices in this discourse. The following section will present concrete examples from the Netherlands and various parts of the world to bolster the argument in the preceding section to showcase how student movements have catalyzed extensive decolonial movements and generated significant impacts. Third, I will investigate decolonial activities at UCR and share personal experiences from my involvement in implementing Participatory Action Research at UCR to demonstrate how student-led initiatives can help nurture decolonial processes as both a student and a researcher. This chapter will address the key questions: Why put students at the center of the decolonial project?

The Importance of Students' Voices in Decolonization

“The discussion around decolonizing the university and Decolonizing the curriculum has been going on for years and I connect that very much to student movements.” Dr. Smiet

One might question, why put students at the center regarding discourses of decolonization in higher education? The research conducted by Takhar (2023) on “The Student Voice” emphasizes the pivotal role of student perspectives in the broader processes of decolonizing the university. Takhar (2023) contends that decolonizing the curriculum is inherently linked to the broader goal of decolonizing the entire university. According to Takhar (2023) and Charles (2019), student voices in decolonization refer to students' input to

pedagogical decisions such as curriculum development that help foster critical conversation and spaces where resources and curriculum are co-produced by learners and instructors. The paper's primary objective was to investigate the significance of student voices in the context of decolonizing the university curriculum in British universities. Kawai (2020) supports this claim by arguing textbooks and core curricula manifest and reflect Eurocentrism and its inherent whiteness. However, to challenge this notion, educators must be willing to listen to students and their experiences (Kawai, 2020). Dr Smiet, in her interview, argues that *"Students who are the spark (...) demand (...) a different education and question the power structures in that. And it is a kind of antagonism between students and professors (...) where the students are ones kind of demanding change, and then the professors are the gatekeepers for that change (...)"* Dr. Smiet contends that students are initiators who go beyond the boundaries of academia to put forth issues that may otherwise go unheard by the university faculty members. However, she believes that professors are seen as gatekeepers, throughout this process, who hold power over students, particularly in terms of curriculum development and teaching-learning procedures. Various scholars, including Seale et al. (2014), posit that student's voices offer insights into issues that were not previously looked into such as diversification of the curriculum based on students' experiences within the university. They support this argument based on a case study whereby incorporating students' voices led to the co-creation of the EDI agenda in the university, which was previously overlooked by the university authorities. processes.

However, a recurring theme in these articles is that student activism and voices alone may not suffice for the decolonization of universities and curricula. According to Dar et al. (2020), decolonization efforts cannot solely rely on students; they necessitate support from academic members. To successfully implement decolonial changes in education, there must be ongoing support and collaboration from the faculties.

Smiet supports Dar et al. (2020)'s argument on the importance of collaboration between students and staff, stating:

“So, I think the most productive path is one in which students and staff work together because we have a common interest but it also requires professors to give up some of the powers that they hold as the ones who design education”

This collaboration, as highlighted in the quote, emphasizes the significance for professors to relinquish some control over educational design and execution, as they recognize their position as *“king of boss over the curriculum.”* Thus, integrating student voices into decision-making processes becomes crucial, as Smiet questions: *“What would it mean to really have student voice at the table?”* Likewise, Maine & Wagner (2021) assert that fostering engagement between academic professionals and students regarding decolonization can bring these vital stakeholders together. Through this engagement, it provides academic professionals and staff with insights into the lived experiences of the students they are educating. This enables students to connect and respond genuinely and effectively to the issues at hand (Seale *et al*, 2014). This means students have a significant role in parts of major decision-making in curriculum changes. That is because students are directly impacted by the curriculum and teaching methods. Therefore, involving students with academics in the decolonial processes helps create a strong force in this approach. I support this claim and would further posit that professors must be willing to cede some control over curriculum and prioritize student input as suggested in the quote to foster a more decolonial and effective educational environment. In the context of UCR, where students from diverse backgrounds come together in classroom⁶, there are certain areas where students may have information more due to their

⁶ See UCR Website : <https://www.ucr.nl/ucr-101/>

cultural background and prior knowledge; however, by incorporating student input in curriculum development, there needs to be a space where professors should be able to learn new things, confront their prejudice, and foster environment that is safe and inclusive (Mossavi, 2022). This collaboration, in my opinion, not only empowers students but also contributes to decolonial processes within academia, aligning with the overarching argument of the thesis. The significance of student voices becomes even more noticeable when these theories are put into practice in spaces such as classrooms where these two stakeholders, students, and instructors, interact with each other, which is a topic that will be further explored in Chapter 3.

Exploring Decolonial Aesthetics: Perspectives from the Netherlands and Beyond

Following the discussion on the importance of student initiatives and their central role in the decolonial movements, it is pertinent to examine concrete examples that substantiate this assertion. The case of the Netherlands provides a compelling example of how student movements can catalyze significant changes within higher education. The student occupations of the Bungehuis and Maagdenhuis in 2014 demonstrate how student-led movements can confront power structures and advocate for reforms, bolstering the argument for putting students at the forefront of decolonization initiatives.

In 2014, sixty students took the bold step to occupy the Bungehuis, the home of UvA's humanities faculty, in protest against the neoliberalist policies of the university (de Ploeg & de Ploeg, 2017). The occupation of the Bungehuis, which housed the faculty of Humanities of UvA, was not merely a temporary disruption but a strategic move aimed at interrupting existing power structures and demanding accountability from university authorities. However, it

was the subsequent occupation of the Maagdenhuis, the UvA's administrative headquarters, that truly galvanized the movement (de Ploeg & de Ploeg, 2017). The occupation lasted for six weeks, which now symbolized the culmination of student activism and marked a historic moment in the struggle for educational reform. This occupation served as a potent symbol of dissent, highlighting the growing discontent among students regarding the prioritization of market-driven policies over academic integrity (Schaart, 2015). The diverse coalition of students, including the newly formed University of Colour (UoC), brought a critical perspective to the forefront, challenging the university's complicity in perpetuating colonial legacies and systemic inequalities. UoC aimed to unmask the inherent whiteness and patriarchy embedded within the university's structure, which underscored the need for decolonization as a prerequisite of genuine democratization. This cross-collaboration by bringing together two demands, democratization and decolonization, is unique in itself, as these protests illustrate that one needs to go hand in hand to achieve the larger goal of decolonial transformation of educational institutions. Their slogan, "*No Democratization without Decolonization*," concisely captured the intertwined nature of these struggles and emphasized the imperative of addressing colonial power dynamics (de Ploeg & de Ploeg, 2017).

Moreover, the impact of the occupations extended far beyond the confines of the university campus, sparking national discourse and media attention. Issues such as educational degradation, financial opacity, and excessive work pressure were brought to the forefront, prompting widespread public debate and solidarity (Schaart, 2015). In response to mainstream narratives, initiatives like the Decolonial School emerged as crucial platforms for alternative education and discourse. Led by activists, artists, and educators, such as Gloria Wekker and Ronaldo Vazquez, the Decolonial School provided a space for critical engagement and collective empowerment, challenging dominant narratives and fostering solidarity among marginalized communities (de Ploeg & de Ploeg, 2017). Professors and staff also joined this

movement in solidarity with the students (NOS, 2015). This also illustrates the importance of student-staff collaboration to achieve decolonization.

It is pertinent to emphasize that the impact of student protests in the Netherlands extended across continents, inspiring students and fostering similar movements around the world. Particularly in South Africa and the UK movements like RhodesMustFall and FeesMustFall gained momentum (de Ploeg & de Ploeg, 2017). The #Rhodesmustfall movement emerged as a response to students' discontent with the presence of colonial symbols and cultures that still permeated university life at several higher education institutions (Grange, 2016). The focal point of this movement was the students' demand for the removal of statues depicting figures like Cecil John Rhodes and other colonial icons from universities and public spaces (Mlaba, 2021). Likewise, as students began to bring additional higher education issues to the forefront, it evolved into what we now recognize as the #feesmustfall movement in South Africa. The core of the #feesmustfall movement centered around protests against the rising costs of university tuition in South Africa (Grange, 2016). Students demanded a reduction in fees or even the complete elimination of university fees to pave the way for free higher education (South African History Online, n.d.). In addition to fee-related concerns, the movement also highlighted the need for a decolonized curriculum, the underrepresentation of black South African scholars, concerns about the quality of teaching and learning, outsourcing of staff, and urgent solutions to the shortage of student accommodations (Maine & Wagner, 2021). Maine & Wagner (2021) also argue that the critical outcome of the protest was that it provided a platform for the students to engage in what a decolonized educational system would resemble. This illustrates that decolonization movements could have multiple effects such as reduction or eradication of fees to curriculum changes and is not limited to one universal understanding of what a decolonial movement comprises. These protests played a crucial role

in granting students the opportunity to play an active role in reshaping the landscape of education.

Similarly, at the University of Oxford, the movement gained momentum as more than a thousand protesters assembled to advocate for the removal of a statue of the Victorian imperialist Cecil Rhodes (Dar et al., 2020). This demonstration highlighted the global reach of the decolonization movement and the shared concerns of students regarding the legacy of colonial figures in academic institutions. The movement's influence transcended national boundaries, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the struggle for decolonization and equality in higher education on a global scale.

This segment of the chapter illustrated two main discourses surrounding decolonizing the university and curriculum. First, it stressed the key role of student initiatives in challenging established norms and advocating for decolonial change. Here, various scholarly articles supported this notion by emphasizing how student input in curriculum development gives instructors the space to self-introspect and challenge their established ideologies of what should be incorporated into the curriculum. Hence, by incorporating students' lived experiences and input, educators also get the opportunity to learn something new that they might have ignored in the past. Secondly, the example of the Netherlands, illustrated by the student occupations of Bungehuis and Maagdenhuis, serves as a compelling example of how student activism can galvanize movements for decolonization within academia. Furthermore, these protests echoed globally, inspiring similar movements in countries like South Africa and the UK. This interconnectedness highlights the importance of student voices in the struggle for decolonization and equality in higher education on a global scale. By examining these examples, it becomes evident that students are instrumental in the processes of decolonization

and also demonstrate their potential to shape the direction of universities toward decolonial and inclusive spaces.

Decolonial Aesthetics at UCR

Building on the previous section, the developments of decolonization were subsequently occurring at UCR, where different initiatives were taking place. Decolonial movements and student initiatives were also active at UCR both influencing and being influenced by events occurring outside its wall. At University College Roosevelt (UCR), numerous projects have been initiated to foster discourse and exploration of decolonial history, notably focusing on Middelburg, a site that is significant in slave history.

In 2010, UCR and Duke University collaborated on the inauguration of the Decolonial Summer School in Middelburg, coordinated by Dr. Ronaldo Vazquez (Decolonial Summer School Middelburg, 2013). This initiative aimed to critically engage with the modern/colonial order and explore decolonial alternatives, continuing with successive editions. The Summer course commenced on the 1st of July, coinciding with the commemoration of the abolition of slavery in the Netherlands (Utrecht University, 2023). It served as a platform that brought together academics and artists from diverse geographical locations and a wide spectrum of academic disciplines. The faculty comprised experts from various domains such as sociology, linguistics, political science, feminism, visual arts, and dance. This educational initiative attracted and created a platform for students but also notable scholars including Walter Mingolo, Artwel Cain, Maria Lugones, Gloria Wekker, Gurminder K Bhambra, and other prominent figures (Decolonial Summer School Middelburg, 2013). This diverse composition illustrates that decoloniality goes beyond disciplinary boundaries and aims to penetrate across fields and institutions (Utrecht University, 2023). The collective objective of the course was to foster discussion and disseminate knowledge on decolonial thinking to students, activists, and

scholars (Decolonial Summer School Middelburg, 2013). Different years had different themes and topics that invited different speakers of decolonial thinking in the Global South and critical thought in the Global North (Decolonial Summer School Middelburg, 2013).

Year	Course Title
2010	Slavery, The Holocaust and the Challenge of Global Justice
2011	Coloniality, Slavery and the Holocaust: Introducing the Decolonial Option
2012	The New World (Dis) Order and the Challenge of Social Justice: Ethics and the Decolonial Option
2013	Slavery: The past and Present Social (Un) Justice: Introducing the Decolonial Option
2014	Democracy, Slavery and the Decolonial option
2015	Stolen Memories: Museum, Slavery and (De) Coloniality
2016	What does it mean to Decolonize? Introducing the Decolonial Option
2017	No Information
2018	WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “DECOLONIZE”? Democracy and the Others of Europe
2019	What does it mean to "Decolonize"? The Consumption of Life and the Regeneration of the Communal
2020	No Information
2021	Learning to Unlearn Decolonially: Living, Knowing, The University and The Museum

Table 1

Concurrently, UCR faculty launched the Going Glocal Program in 2021, promoting community-engaged learning and global citizenship through interdisciplinary collaboration and fieldwork in Namibia, Mexico, and the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in the US. Likewise, faculty-led initiatives, such as Dr. Nancy Mykoff's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) fellowship, have furthered efforts to promote inclusive practices within UCR. Dr. Mykoff's work as an EDI fellow includes organizing think tanks, seminars, and orientation programs related to EDI, underscoring the university's commitment to fostering a more equitable and inclusive campus environment. These collective efforts signify a significant step towards addressing systemic inequalities and fostering a more inclusive educational landscape at UCR.

In tandem with these initiatives, the Anti-Racism Collective (ARC) emerged in 2021, initiated by UCR students Arya Meheta, Katherine Tô-Hauser, Ryan Rama, Isabel, and Laura Maze. Inspired by a sociology course, Social and Political Movements, ARC aimed to establish safe spaces for people of color (POC) and advocate for institutional change within UCR, utilizing intersectional approaches to address various forms of oppression. Through structured meetings and collaborative efforts, ARC sought to hold the UCR administration accountable while raising awareness about issues of racism, inequality, and discrimination through events and collaborations with other student groups. The founding students coordinated meetings by sharing agendas on a Facebook group chat that was open to all students at UCR. The discussions of these meetings revolved around the lists of demands, strategies for achieving them, and the creation of secure spaces for people of color.

The significance of student initiatives in driving change was exemplified by a UCR Professor's reflection:

"I would not even have been aware of it (Decolonization) ...without student initiatives here... The effect of student initiatives was that (...) the faculty and staff also started to talk about it, and in my case, I became aware of it because I just never considered it."

This testimony underscores the impact of student-led initiatives in raising awareness and sparking conversations among faculty and staff. Takhar (2023) argues that involving students in pedagogical decisions and institutionalizing the decolonization of the curriculum are two critical steps toward achieving decolonial transformation. By fostering decolonial conversations through open discussions, focus groups, reading, and learning, universities can better equip themselves to implement pedagogical practices that align with the broader objective of decolonizing the curriculum. Alongside ARC, there are other student initiatives such as Femmetalk which focuses on discussions related to feminism and gender, Not Your Honey (NYH) looks into gender and racial violence at UCR and PRISM a queer student initiative. A list of student initiatives at UCR is presented in the figure below.

Initiatives at UCR

Several student initiatives at UCR relate to topics of diversity, inclusion, and decoloniality.

The Anti-Racism Collective: The Anti-Racism Collective strives to create safe spaces for POC students, while simultaneously enforcing institutional change through holding UCR accountable.

Not Your Honey: NYH is a student initiative focused on raising awareness on sexual and gender related violence and harassment within University and in Middelburg

Femmetalk: This is a student-led intersectional group which aims to create safe spaces for everyone to talk about social issues with a feminist perspective. It aims to create space to listen and share anything related to FLINTA. Their goal is to build a supportive community.

PRISM: RASA's committee that hosts LGBTQIA+ related events such as discussions, book sharing clubs,. Beyond this, PRISM hosts events such as Gender in the Blender in the Elliott Basement.

DRAG: Disability Rights Action Group is a student initiative to support and fight for the rights of disabled students of UCR. They aim to ensure that UCR spaces, communities and narratives are more inclusive and less ableist. They host focus groups to gain insights into student problems and address with different student boards..

Contact for More information:

ARC: antiracismcollective@ucr.nl

NYH: notyourhoney@ucr.nl

FemmeTalk: femmetalk@ucr.nl

DRAG: drag@ucr.nl

Personal Anecdote

Being inspired by student initiatives across the world, this paper aimed to contribute to the ongoing decolonial efforts at UCR. During the 4 months dedicated to Participatory Action Research, I utilized focus groups and collaborated with various student initiatives at UCR to gather valuable insight, and information and to foster decolonization. This approach was informed by the understanding that students have a vital role to play in reshaping their educational environment and challenging colonial legacies. Although this paper will not delve into intricate details of every focus group and event, it will aim to highlight the major achievements attained through my research. The initial section will explore the intricacies of EDI at UCR followed by a series of guest lectures that I organized during my research.

Among several ways one can begin the project of decolonization, Shahjahan et al. (2021) list two methods for decolonization: inward-facing and outward-facing tactics. Strategies that adopt an outward-facing approach advocate for initiatives that extend beyond the confines of academic institutions, the one that aims to engage with external communities. This can entail bringing in outside speakers with a range of experiences to provide viewpoints that are not often covered in the curriculum. Conversely, inward-facing strategies include efforts to bring change within the internal structures. This entails revising curricula to incorporate students' perspectives, implementing pedagogical approaches that challenge dominant narratives and power dynamics, and organizing events that foster decolonial conversation.

EDI

Inspired by the framework offered by Shahjahan et al. (2021), I focused on prompting change within the institutional framework. By engaging with focus groups, I facilitated open

discussions and exchanges of ideas, allowing participants to share their experiences, opinions, and suggestions related to the research topic. One of the primary initiatives I undertook was to organize focus groups on different themes every month from September to December. The details of events organized each month can be found in Figure 3. In this paper, I will only use the information gathered from the EDI focus group organized in October. This interactive approach helped me gain deeper insights into the issues being explored and provided diverse perspectives.

On October 3rd, 2023, an open discussion was organized to address the significance of EDI at UCR. This focus group was organized following the decision by Executive Board⁷ to consider closing a previously inactive committee due to a lack of engagement. In response to concerns raised about the potential closure of the committee in 2023, the focus group served as a platform for students to express their perspectives and articulate the importance of EDI at UCR.

The focus group started by discussing the dissolution of the EDI committee and engaging in a dialogue with the dean about the reasons behind this decision. Following this discussion, the students were asked: “How would you envision the role of the EDI committee at UCR if it were to be reinstated?” The students outlined the following perspectives: One student emphasized the importance of sex education and diversity training during the introduction week for new incoming students, especially in the international space where students from diverse backgrounds meet. The participant also highlighted the need for faculty education, covering topics beyond their expertise, to create a more inclusive learning environment. Furthermore, they emphasized the need to address life as a student in Middelburg, a conservative city where many students experience obstacles from the local

⁷ The Executive Board at UCR consists of the Dean and the Managing Director.

community. EDI was seen as an invaluable resource for students dealing with everyday issues regarding racism, discrimination, and homophobia. Regarding these aspects, students suggested immediate access to counselors or psychologists through EDI to assist with issues, advocating for avoiding bureaucratic delays in student assistance. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of ensuring that EDI counselors represent the diverse student body, avoiding the appointment of solely white individuals in these roles.

After this focus group, I continually met with different student initiatives and the Executive Board to re-think, plan, and use the information from the focus groups to reinstate a new EDI committee with a new mandate. Through collaborative efforts and advocacy, we successfully secured the reinstatement of the EDI committee in November 2023. A proposal was sent to the Executive Board to reinstate the EDI committee with a specific role and working mechanism. This proposal was accepted by the dean. The proposal for the EDI committee's continuation, along with detailed documentation of the focus group discussions and workshop outcomes, can be found in Appendix 10 of this thesis.

Within the multiple roles I play in this research as an activist/researcher and Chair of the UCR Council, I took the initiative to prioritize EDI as a recurring theme during discussions with Council Members and the Executive Board. During the EDI focus group, students emphasized the need for faculty education, covering topics such as EDI. By recognizing the role of co-governance bodies at UCR in shaping policy-making and curriculum development at UCR, I invited external experts, ECHO, and the Expertise Centre for Diversity Policy, to facilitate a workshop related to EDI on 30th January 2024.⁸ The workshop was designed to facilitate discussions on policymaking through an EDI lens, providing co-governance members

⁸ This workshop was attended by the Dean, five student representatives of the co-governance bodies, five faculty members, and the Dean.

and other stakeholders with valuable insights and tools to integrate EDI principles into their decision-making frameworks. The workshop aimed to create spaces where EDI issues are central in decision-making processes and ensure that the voices and experiences of all members of the UCR community are valued and reflected. These experiences underscore the transformative potential of PAR as a methodology for driving meaningful change within academic institutions, while also highlighting the importance of adopting a multi-faceted approach to decolonization that encompasses both outward-facing and inward-facing strategies. The proposal for the workshop can be found in the appendix 13.

Guest Lectures

In addition to these inward-facing initiatives, one of the several initiatives I undertook was to organize a series of guest lectures featuring scholars specializing in fields such as queerness, religion, and intersectionality. These lectures were intended to provide students with critical insights and alternate viewpoints on topics that are frequently overlooked in traditional academic settings, therefore complementing the current curriculum.

Facilitated by my network of contacts after spending a semester at University College Utrecht and the broader academic community, these guest lectures catalyzed meaningful dialogue and reflection. By inviting scholars from diverse backgrounds to share their expertise, I sought to challenge the epistemic hegemony inherent in traditional academic discourse and foster a more inclusive and decolonial learning environment.

In the initial lecture series, I had the privilege of hosting Dr. Gerard Van De Ree on 14th September 2023, who delivered an insightful talk titled “Queering Power: Thinking Across Coloniality, Gender, and Human-Nature Relations.” Dr. Van De Ree’s expertise in the intersection of queerness, power dynamics, and colonial legacies provided a nuanced

exploration of how notions of power are shaped by historical and sociocultural contexts. By critically examining the interplay between coloniality, gender constructs, and human-nature relations, Dr. Van De Ree challenged prevailing norms and invited attendees to reevaluate their understanding of power dynamics within contemporary society.

For the second lecture, I welcomed Dr. Markha Valenta on 23rd November 2023, whose presentation titled “Understanding the Complexities of Intersectionality: Sexuality, Religion, and Race” delved into the intricate intersections of identity and social categorizations. Drawing on her extensive research in the fields of sexuality, religion, and race, Dr. Valenta offered a comprehensive analysis of how individuals navigate multiple axes of privilege and oppression. Through illuminating case studies, personal experiences, and theoretical frameworks, Dr. Valenta highlighted the importance of recognizing and addressing the complexities of intersectionality in both academic discourse and everyday interactions.

Both lectures provided invaluable insights into topics that are often marginalized within traditional academic settings. By inviting scholars to engage with our university community, I aimed to broaden the scope of discourse and foster critical reflection on issues of power, identity, and social justice. This approach in my research is part of the delinking process, where I aimed to bring expertise from outside of UCR to create spaces to discuss topics that I believed were not typically addressed within the confines of the institution. These lectures served as catalysts for meaningful dialogue and sparked further exploration of the complexities inherent in decolonial praxis within higher education. All posters and event details can be found in the appendix section of this paper.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the transformative role of students in advancing the process of decolonization, particularly in the Netherlands and at UCR. It does so in two main ways. Firstly, the chapter delved into various literature to explore the central role of student voices in decolonial projects. Scholars like Takhar (2023) argue that students are pivotal to decolonization because they are directly influenced by the curriculum and educational system and if they would like to make changes, they would do so in many forms such as protests, occupation, and other methods. This has been evident in numerous student-led movements in the Netherlands, such as the Maagdenhuis occupation, and also global movements like the #RhodesMustFallMovement in South Africa and the UK. These student-led movements allowed me to answer my research question: why are students at the forefront of decolonial projects? However, it also raises intriguing inquiries, such as envisioning an academic setting where students and instructors collaborate in the decolonization process. Particularly in classrooms, what would it entail for instructors to share some power with students in knowledge production? These questions will be further explored and discussed in Chapter 3. Lastly, by drawing inspiration from these student-led initiatives, I devised a four-month PAR aimed at bringing about decolonial changes at UCR. During this research, I perused two main approaches. Firstly, through inward-facing decolonization, particularly by employing focus groups, I gathered information from students about issues they identified at UCR and the changes they wanted to see. By leveraging the multiple roles I played during this research and having continuous meetings with student-led initiatives at UCR, I addressed some of the issues raised. For instance, along with the help of the student initiatives, I reinstated the EDI committee which had been dissolved by the Executive Board. Secondly, I engaged in outward-facing decolonization by inviting scholars from outside UCR to provide their expertise within the themes of decolonization, creating new spaces for students to discuss these issues.

Additionally, I organized an EDI workshop in collaboration with the ECHO, for decision-making bodies at UCR, including Co-Governance bodies and the Management Board, to equip them with tools for making decisions on topics related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. By combining these approaches, I aimed to foster a decolonial transformation at UCR on a small scale.

Chapter 3: Classrooms as Sites of Decolonial Praxis:

Empowering Education for Change

Typically, when we see classrooms, we picture students seated at desks, taking notes, doing their homework, and taking tests. For many, education looks like this (Anderson, 2022). In a system where knowledge is created top-down, one never considers the possibility that it could be more than just a place where students listen to the lecture. This is what the colonization of classrooms means. Today, it manifests itself through different structures and systems to only benefit those in power (Anderson, 2022). Additionally, colonization and these power relations exist in the classroom. To view classrooms as a colonized space, one must examine the system that educational institutions are a part of. This may be the case with the course curriculum and the degree of hierarchical structure in the teaching-learning process (Parker *et al*, 2017). Regardless, it is important to acknowledge that classrooms are inherently part of the colonial system, however, it is also an important site for decolonial transformation. This chapter will look into examples of how academics can create spaces that promote decolonial thinking in universities. This is crucial in academic spaces because it allows students to voice their opinions in spaces where they are encouraged to self-reflect and scrutinize the established norms in academia. This chapter will aim to answer the following question: How do classrooms serve as a crucial environment for fostering the processes of decolonization? The chapter will follow the following structure: First, it will examine how classrooms are inherently a colonial environment, yet simultaneously a space that holds potential for decolonial transformation. Similarly, the second part will explore why safe and brave spaces are essential for fostering decolonial transformation and promoting radical openness.

Classrooms as Colonizing Space and Locus for Decolonial Transformation

Parker *et al.* (2017) acknowledge that classrooms and universities constitute a colonizing environment rooted in a historical legacy of academic knowledge production and dissemination that has been controlled by affluent men of European descent. On the other hand, it is equally critical to highlight that these educational spaces have the potential to serve as a locus for decolonial transformation. With the help of academics and students, it is possible to create room for decolonial discourses and challenge prevailing ideologies (Parker *et al.*, 2017). The university classroom, in particular, stands as a significant entry point for fostering decolonizing efforts and facilitating changes.

The course developed by Parker *et al.* (2017) on “*Decolonizing Methodologies*” at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), devised a framework that aimed to provide students with not only exposure to relevant literature but also a platform to grapple with the inherent tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes associated with decolonization. The course originated from a small grant from UNC-CH’s College of Arts and Sciences interdisciplinary initiative which initially began as a two-hour workshop. Later, the workshop evolved into a typical graduate seminar with an enrollment of five to fifteen students, with a limit set at 20 (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, n.d.). *Decolonizing Methodologies* now is the core required course for UNC’s Graduate Certificate in Participatory Research.

Their approach began with epistemological and ontological inquiries into the construction of knowledge. In this course, they implemented various discussion points (Parker *et al.*, 2017):

1. Encouraging a culture of radical openness, wherein educators are guided by students' experiences within academia.
2. Scrutinizing established research norms and identifying critical areas entrenched in colonizing practices.
3. Creating spaces that facilitate collaborative knowledge co-production, which represents an internal, self-reflective decolonization process.

These discussion points serve as a foundational framework for subsequent discussion in this chapter. First, it will dive more into the rationale as to why students should be part of knowledge co-production. This could appear in contexts like curriculum development and encouraging recognition of including student perspectives in these procedures. Next, I will look at the idea of developing a culture of radical openness. I intended to investigate the viability of such an environment and discuss the conditions for creating a place suitable for radical openness in classrooms.

One aspect highlighted by Parker et al. (2017) is the creation of spaces that facilitate collaborative knowledge co-production. Several questions arise: what would it look like for students to be part of the knowledge production process, and what would happen if instructors shared some power with the students? Dr. Smiet addresses this by stating: *“We (students and professors) come together in the classroom and bring with us (..) our personal histories and how we are situated through webs of powers. In that moment (..) teachers have a different role from the student and students carry a different responsibility. Therefore, it requires investment from all parties.*

What Dr. Smiet means by students and teachers having different roles and responsibilities is that she views students as critically interrogating the education they are receiving and questioning the power structures within it. She emphasizes that students are the

ones demanding changes, whereas teachers are seen as the gatekeepers for those changes. Thus, to bring out the decolonial transformation, investment from both parties remains vital when they meet in areas such as classrooms.

She continues to question what happens in that space of encounter. She postulates “*For me, that’s about pedagogy or about how do we shape the encounter? What’s power? What powers as teachers are they willing to give up or what responsibilities do they need to hold on to.*” Smith’s argument links with Parker et al’s discussion point that it is essential to create spaces that facilitate collaborative knowledge co-production, which represents an internal, self-reflective decolonization process (Moosavi, 2022). According to Moosavi (2022), decolonial reflexivity refers to looking back into oneself, especially for scholars and instructors, to introspectively locate the inadequacies, limitations, and contradictions within their efforts to decolonize. This involves questioning whether instructors are genuinely decolonizing or if it is merely a performance of decoloniality to check a box on a list. Therefore, through self-introspection and decolonial reflexivity, instructors should also question to what extent students should have a voice in shaping and developing the curriculum. In this way, it is possible to change the hierarchy that exists in academia as Smith argues.

Particularly, in the case of UCR, the student body is diverse, encompassing individuals from varying backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.⁹ This diversity enriches the classroom environment by fostering an exchange of ideas and viewpoints. This was evident in my PAR during focus groups and open discussions where the participants represented various nationalities and cultural and ethnic backgrounds. These diverse perspectives contributed to a rich dialogue and allowed for a deeper exploration of decolonial topics.¹⁰ Therefore, this paper

⁹ See UCR Website : <https://www.ucr.nl/ucr-101/>

¹⁰ I write this argument from my personal experience by carrying out four months PAR

suggests that diversity fosters an exchange of ideas, and viewpoints, and offers instructors at UCR to practice decolonial reflexivity. As students share their unique experiences and insights, this paper postulates that instructors gain valuable insights into different cultural, social, and academic perspectives that they might have not been aware of. For instance, one of the professors at UCR mentioned *“I would not even have been aware of it (Decolonization) ...without student initiatives here... The effect of student initiatives was that (...) the faculty and staff also started to talk about it, and in my case, I became aware of it because I just never considered it.”* This bolsters the argument on how the diversity of student culture at UCR also creates new learning spaces for instructors at UCR and provides them the opportunity to engage in decolonial reflexivity.

Additionally, Parker et al., (2017) argue that the classroom should create a culture of radical openness, one that allows students to scrutinize the research norms but also create spaces to facilitate collaborative knowledge production. Radical Openness is a phrase explored by Bell Hooks in her 1989 article “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” which delves into the concept of radical openness as a means of confronting oppressive power structure (Monie, n.d.). Hooks argues that classrooms represent the most radical space within academia, urging students to expand their perspectives (Hooks, 1989). She stresses that classrooms are not safe havens but rather places where individuals are constantly at risk, emphasizing the need for a community of resistance (Hooks, 1989). By embracing radical openness, Luguetti et al., (2023) suggest that dialogues among peers can disrupt hegemonic and colonized views. However, I tend to differ from Bell Hooks’s argument that classrooms cannot be safe havens as they embrace radical openness. Instead, I argue that classrooms should first provide safe and brave spaces for students before they delve into creating radical openness. In the upcoming section, I will argue why safe and brave spaces should serve as a prerequisite to creating radical openness and explain its meanings.

Classrooms as Safe and Brave Spaces

Bell Hooks brings up several important points regarding viewing classrooms as spaces where radical openness is exercised. However, I believe there is an additional perspective to consider. This section of the paper argues that before reaching a stage of radical openness within the classroom, there needs to be a foundation in which students feel comfortable, unjudged, and able to express their opinions. Therefore, to create a basis for students to feel comfortable and safe, this paper proposes the creation of two types of spaces in classrooms: safe and brave spaces. This paper argues that after achieving a safe space, a brave space can be reached, through which radical openness can be exercised.

The concept of safe spaces revolves around creating an environment free of judgment and focused on the safety of marginalized communities. Building upon this idea, the notion of a “Brave Space” is an extension of safe spaces. The term brave space is used by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens (2013) where they outline four common rules to create a brave space: learning to agree to disagree, not taking things personally, challenging by choices, and showing respect with no attacks. By shifting our language from “safe” to “brave,” the aim is to encourage people to feel more comfortable expressing themselves freely (Arao & Clemens, 2013). To create a Brave Space in classrooms, one might introduce the idea to their students and then initiate conversations using the four central elements above to foster open and understanding dialogue (Curry et al., 2023). Therefore, incorporating a brave space in classrooms provides a potential way to open conversations and communication for students. Thus, these spaces emerge as the ideal format to encourage connections among students and affirm one’s identity and expression while also challenging beliefs and encouraging growth through sharing. Through this, this paper argues that a space of radical openness is established in classrooms, which aligns with what Bell Hooks argues. Hooks emphasizes

that “classrooms are not inherently safe places; rather, one is always at risk and needs a community of resistance” (Hooks, 1989). Therefore, to first create a community of resistance, this paper argues a foundation of safe and brave spaces is necessary.

However, returning to the core, this paper will now explore how safe and brave space remains vital and serves as a foundation for radical openness, as expressed by several interviews in this research.

“Classrooms are an ideal space and by opening up the space and keeping it possible for students to talk and engage into dialogue with each other and to listen, but also to find the courage to open up and to speak, and to know other students will not dismiss you or humiliate you because it is a safe space.” Dr. Hoving

This quote by Dr. Hoving supports the above-mentioned argument about the importance of creating spaces where students are not judged, as it is essential for students to feel safe to speak freely. Safe and Brave spaces provide a foundation for students to engage in sensitive discussions without fear of humiliation or judgment. Utilizing the four principles suggested by Arao & Clemens (2013), which include learning to agree to disagree, not taking things personally, challenging by choices, and showing respect with no attacks, further facilitates decolonial dialogue. Safe and Brave spaces remain fundamental as they allow students to participate in discussions openly, fostering an environment conducive to learning and growth.

Similarly, courses like the Decolonizing Methodologies by Parker et al. (2017) emphasize the significance of creating spaces that facilitate the co-production of knowledge. Such spaces encourage dialogue, collaboration, and partnerships within the academic community, thereby diversifying perspectives and challenging the prevailing status quo

through inward-facing methods.¹¹ In essence, this case study highlights the transformation of academia toward a more decolonial framework which requires a commitment from educators and institutions. It underscores the role of active engagement, reflection, and dialogue in dismantling colonial structures and promoting a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

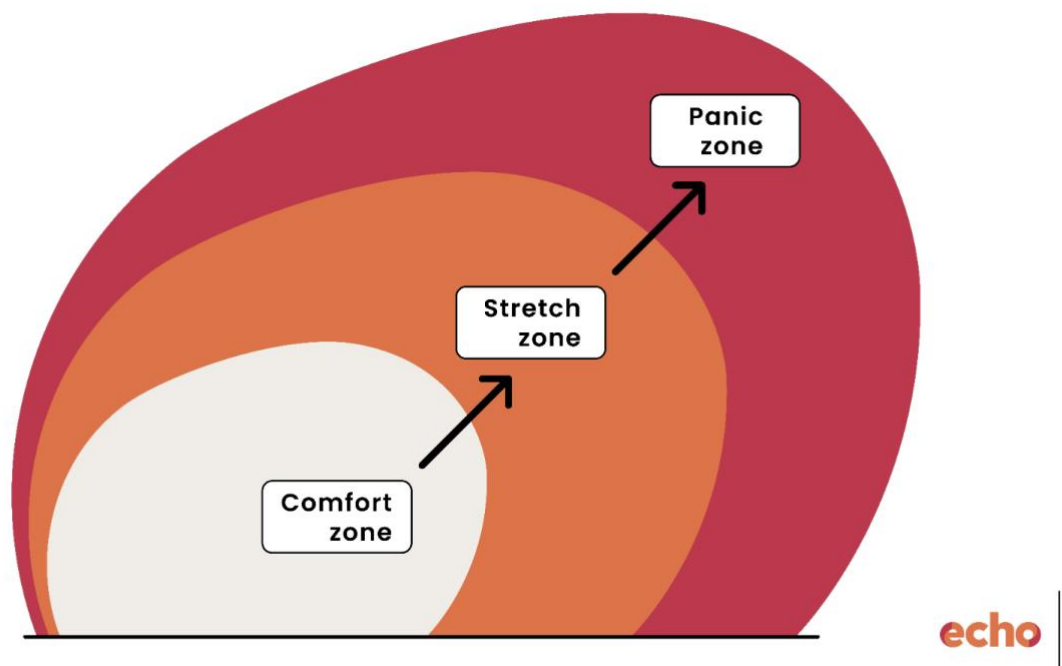


Figure 5

The workshop by ECHO provided this figure that helps us understand how we can interpret brave and safe spaces. Safe spaces would mostly include the comfort zone, while brave spaces would reach the stretch zone where sensitive issues are discussed. This paper suggests that radical openness could be achieved as it reaches the stretch zone.

¹¹ Inward-facing strategies include efforts to bring change within the internal structures. This entails revising curricula to incorporate diverse perspectives and implementing pedagogical approaches that challenge dominant narratives and power dynamics. (Shahjahan et al. 2021)

Furthermore, in analyzing the role of classrooms in decolonization at UCR, professors at UCR emphasized the dual importance of fostering decolonial discourse while maintaining a safe, brave, and inclusive environment for students. Dr Van Gent argues the following:

“In class, I have seen this but not on other occasions, but mainly in class, and now try to create an atmosphere that is safe, open, and secure that they have they get the floor, and they have. However (...) I think it's very good to talk about different perspectives, but one of the dangers to say, Okay, I don't want to listen to that perspective, because it's from a certain angle,(....), it also creates a certain fear that things will be canceled, and that will change because the other side is using the same kind of tactics now.”

This perfectly captures the professor's commitment to creating a space for students who are accepting and encouraging to voice their opinions. Engaging in delicate subjects like colonization, however, may pose challenges. Despite having different opinions, Dr Van Gent stressed the value of engaging with a range of viewpoints, which allows students to explore counterarguments rather than seeking to persuade them to accept one particular view. This stance underscores the value of promoting decolonial thinking and endorses the need to create safe and brave spaces in classrooms.

Dr. Van Gent also emphasized the challenge of navigating sensitive topics during conversations, especially in light of opposing views that could use similar arguments to silence debate. This interview emphasizes the need to connect with varied ideas even when they cause discomfort by recognizing the risks of stifling opinions based just on sensitivity. This aligns with the broader argument that fostering an atmosphere of openness and critical inquiry is essential for meaningful discussions on decolonization and other complex topics within academia.

Dr. Van Gent's point is well supported by Hammana and Klinkert (2021) when they question how we can challenge the existing structure and disrupt the continuous operation of this machine. The authors refer to universities as machines that help maintain and re-generate colonial ideologies and dominance. Therefore, to disrupt this continuous operation, they advocate for creating safe spaces, such as reading groups, courtyards, and hallways, where students can openly exchange their experiences regarding how this colonial machinery affects them. It illustrates the importance of creating safe spaces where people can share their experiences and engage in this collective experience. Decolonial transformation and safe spaces are the recurring themes and arguments in most of the academic journals I have encountered in my research, which also illustrates the immediate need of these spaces in universities. One of the proposed solutions is the establishment of a decolonial education framework that encourages students and education professionals to rethink their pedagogy. When referring to rethinking teaching practices, means educators reconsider teaching methodologies by embracing decolonial reflexivity by introspecting their positionality (Mossavi, 2022). This practice can be adopted during curriculum development where they can incorporate student input. By doing so, the paper aims to establish environments that nurture decolonial transformation and empower students to scrutinize prevailing academics. Furthermore, it encourages students to utilize available methods and tools to question and challenge colonial structures within university settings, including classrooms.

Conclusion:

This chapter has shown that classrooms have historically been spaces of colonization, where power structures dictate the roles of instructors and students. In this framework, instructors hold control over the classrooms and curriculum, while students are seen as passive learners. However, this chapter challenges these colonial narratives in two main ways. First, by drawing concepts from scholars like Bell Hooks, this chapter argued that while classrooms have historically been colonial spaces, they can also serve as decolonial spaces where radical openness is practiced. By fostering a sense of community among students within classrooms, they become a resistance against colonial norms. This paper further argues that while radical openness is vital for scrutinizing the colonial system, it is equally important to create safe spaces within classrooms where students feel comfortable expressing their opinions without prejudice. If students feel judged or humiliated, this paper posited that they may not be able to achieve the state of radical openness where they learn ways to scrutinize colonial structures. Thus, this chapter argued that without the ability to express oneself in classrooms, radical openness cannot be achieved. This assertion is supported by the interviews where the professors at UCR argue that classrooms should be welcoming and where students are encouraged to voice their opinions without fear of judgment. Moreover, this chapter extends the notion of safe spaces by introducing the concept of brave spaces, which pave the path to achieve a space of radical openness. Brian Arao and Kristi (2013) Clemens proposed four common rules to establish a brave space: learning to agree to disagree, not taking things personally, challenging by choices, and showing respect with no attacks. Therefore, shifting the language from “safe” to “brave” space offers an ideal format to encourage students to affirm

their identity and expression, while also challenging beliefs and encouraging decolonial learning through sharing. In sum, this chapter attempted to answer the research question: What is the significance of classrooms in fostering the project of decolonization?

Overall Conclusion

Throughout my paper, I have aimed to answer two questions: What is the role and importance of student initiatives/voices in decolonization processes at University College Roosevelt (UCR)? And what is the significance of classrooms in fostering the project of decolonization? I have answered these questions by looking at preliminary research on relevant literature, carrying out 4 months of participatory action research, and providing perspectives of professors and scholars in the Netherlands and at UCR.

As this paper has shown, diverse definitions of decolonization exist, however, it is imperative to note that there is no single widely agreed definition of decolonization. This is because the definition of decolonization varies depending on how individuals position themselves in terms of geographical locations and temporality as well as how one perceives and experiences colonial violence and structures. Furthermore, this paper has examined various decolonial aesthetics in the Netherlands and across the world by using case studies of the occupation of the University of Amsterdam, alongside student-led protests and initiatives in South Africa and the UK, which led to universities becoming more attentive to decolonial issues in academic spaces. Drawing inspiration from these student-led initiatives, I developed my PAR to investigate my research questions. This paper does so by illustrating various activities such as focus groups, open discussions, lecture and workshop series, and harvest sessions, which were carried out during my four-month PAR. Each month of my PAR was dedicated to themes of decolonization such as gender, race, diversity, and inclusion. Lastly, this paper sheds light on the importance of classrooms as spaces where students should feel safe and ensure an inclusive environment. This argument is supported by a range of interviews with professors at UCR and

scholars from the Netherlands who believe that safe spaces remain at the core of fostering radical openness in classrooms. In addition to safe spaces, this paper presents brave spaces as another key concept that enables students to express their opinions without feeling judged. As a result, a space of radical openness is established that encourages students to challenge and scrutinize the structures in which they are embedded and participate in knowledge production processes such as curriculum development by incorporating student input. Particularly, in the case of UCR, the student body is diverse, bringing different perspectives and experiences to the classroom. This diversity creates a space where ideas are exchanged, providing instructors with the opportunity to learn new concepts.

Therefore, this paper argues that student initiatives are central to decolonial projects in spaces like universities because of the abovementioned reasons. This paper contributes to the existing literature on decolonization in two main ways. First, it provides a hands-on perspective from a student who conducted a decolonial PAR by engaging with the community to bring about decolonial transformation. These changes included reinstating the EDI committee, which was dissolved by the Dean of UCR, and creating spaces where students could share and learn about decolonial themes by organizing workshops and guest lectures. Second, it incorporated the perspectives of professors at UCR on the importance of students' voices in decolonial projects. All professors viewed students as playing a central role in advancing and contributing to decolonial projects. However, some findings are in tension with the existing literature, particularly regarding the role of classrooms. Scholars like Bell Hooks (1989) and Parker et al (2017) argue that classrooms are sites for revolutionary change where radical openness is practiced. However, this paper differs from this perspective and argues that while radical openness is crucial in classrooms, it should first create safe and brave spaces where students feel safe and unjudged. This approach, in return, paves the path for creating revolutionary sites.

It is important to note that this research was solely conducted at University College Roosevelt. Therefore, the findings are limited in scope to UCR which I recognize as a limitation of this research. As mentioned before, the purpose of the research is not to ensure replicability. Instead, this paper could serve as a tool to advance the processes of decolonization. This research serves as a tool for decolonial projects because its purpose was not merely to generate imperative data, but instead to generate knowledge through action by working alongside the UCR community and advocating for decolonial transformation. At the same time, this paper hopes to inspire other students to carry out research that employs methods that challenge colonial structures to further advance the project of decolonization. Particularly by encouraging students to utilize PAR, this paper seeks to empower future researchers to contribute to the ongoing efforts of dismantling oppressive colonial systems within educational institutions. Additionally, it would be beneficial to investigate the collaboration between instructors and students in curriculum development to foster decolonization. Therefore, future research could contribute to the expansion of understanding of the role of student input within classrooms in determining what can be in the curriculum.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Informed Consent For Interviews

*Unveiling Voices: The importance of Student Initiatives on Decolonization, A Case Study at University College Roosevelt
A Participatory Action Research*

I, _____, agree to be interviewed for the thesis project entitled *Unveiling Voices: The importance of Student Initiatives on Decolonization, A Case Study at University College Roosevelt: A Participatory Action Research* produced by Saswot Shankar Shrestha of University College Roosevelt.

I certify that I have been given satisfactory answers to my inquiries concerning project procedures and other matters. I have been advised that I am free to withdraw my consent and to discontinue participation in the thesis project at any time without prejudice.

Information collected for this project which concern my identity (name and position)

☐ should be kept anonymous and confidential unless I explicitly waive my right to confidentiality in respect of a particular quote or quotes.

☐ can be used in the thesis or related academic publications without prejudice to my right to withdraw this consent at any time.

I agree to participate in an electronically recorded interview for this project.

Signature of Interviewee

Date _____

If you cannot obtain satisfactory answers to your questions or have comments or complaints about your treatment in this study, contact:

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

University College Roosevelt

Email: s.shrestha@ucr.nl or s.s.shrestha@students.uu.nl

Appendix 2 Interview Guide: SPER

The purpose of this research is to gain insights from Faculty members from University College Roosevelt to understand of the importance of decolonial processes in higher education, particularly in the context of UCR. This research also aims to look into Faculty member's perspective on the role of student initiative and their personal initiative to decolonization of higher education with the focus at UCR.

General Questions: Introduction and Background:

1. Could you briefly give me an overview of your academic background and your current role at the university?

Understanding of Decolonization:

2. How would you define decolonisation within the context of higher education or at UCR?
 - a. Probe Question: Where did you first encounter this topic?
3. Can you share any experiences or instances where you have encountered discussions or initiatives related to decolonisation?
 - a. Probe Question: Yes/ No: Do you think it is important to be aware about this discussion?
 - b. What about in the context of UCR? Have you encountered discussions or initiatives related to decolonisation?

Perceptions of Student Initiatives:

4. What is the role of students in decolonisation of educational institution?
 - a. If so, could you explain how you see their role in this process?
 - b. Probe Question If Yes/No: From your perspective, how crucial do you believe student initiatives are in advancing the process of decolonisation within academic institutions?
 - c. In your experience, have you observed any notable examples where student-led initiatives have positively influenced the decolonisation efforts at our university or others?

Personal Involvement:

- d. Have you personally been involved in any initiatives or projects aimed at incorporating decolonial perspectives into your teaching or research activities?

- a. Probe Question: If yes, could you share your experiences/examples and any outcomes or lessons learned?
- b. If No, do you think it is important to incooperate decolonial perspectives into your teaching and research activities?
- e. Do you think classrooms serve as an important place to foster decolonial perspective?

Challenges and Concerns:

- f. In your academic discipline, are there specific considerations or challenges related to decolonisation that you think are particularly pertinent?
 - a. Probe: If you have not incooperate the ideas of decolonisation, would you want to add it in the near future? Yes/No Why?
- g. What challenges or concerns, if any, do you foresee in integrating student-led initiatives into broader decolonisation strategies within the university?

Collaboration Between Students and Faculty:

- h. How do you view the collaboration between students and faculty in fostering a decolonized learning environment?
- i. In your opinion, what are the key factors that contribute to successful collaboration between students and faculty in decolonisation efforts?
- j. From your viewpoint, what role should faculty play in supporting and facilitating student initiatives focused on decolonisation?

Closing Thoughts

- k. How do you envision the future of decolonisation efforts in higher education, and what role do you see for both faculty and students in shaping this future?

Final remarks:

Name/Pseudonym:

Age:

Name of organization/institution:

Gender (optional):

Appendix 3: Dr. Isabel Hoving Transcript

SEPR Saswot Shankar Shrestha

Duration: 46:16

13th February 2024

Hoving, I. (Isabel)

Oh, that's that's a job taken away from you. So yeah, that took so many hours earlier. Yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 0:11

Definitely. I think the transcription is on, but before I start I just wanted to say thank you and for agreeing to the meeting and also for the interview. The purpose of this interview is to gain insight into the development of decolonization in Dutch Higher education, but at the same time to gain your insight in your work and how you include a process of decolonization in your studies, but also in your research. But to begin with, a general question, could you briefly give me an overview of your academic background and your current role at the university you are teaching? I know you are retired but also.

Hoving, I. (Isabel)

Yeah, I wanted to start with that, but.

Yes, I started out by going to a teacher training college. In Dutch language and French, Even so. So that's where I started and I started teaching in secondary education. And I think that was an excellent preparation. I think every academic teacher should start there. So I love teaching, but then I just missed.

Academic thought and I think, well, I need to have some more information, some more knowledge. So then I went back to university, was teaching at the same time it was also at a time that the time of the great Emancipation, Emancipation movement. So feminism was there. And it was this reflection on, on racism going on. But I think the feminism was most loudest at a time, but it all came together, you know.

So already intersectionality, without us being aware of that.

Was what it was that you could describe it as such. So then I went to study and I was very much. I fell in love with literary theory because I thought, well, this is where politics, aesthetics, emotion, psychology, everything comes together. So this is what I need to do to work. I want to do so I. But it was very new. So women's studies was not institutionalized. It was not even not institutionalized at the university but it was a group of. Of young women teachers mostly. Some students will start to create a place for that, and I was terribly excited. I was already active, part of the feminist movement, so I thought, oh, wonderful, wonderful. And as I said, it was also this grown awareness of racism at the heart of University, but also class prejudice. I think that, yeah, sexuality, sexual diversity. So I was kind of teaming up with more people. So I wrote my

dissertation on a certain American writer, but not feminist, but on women's issues. But then when I done it, I thought, well, this was a white woman and I really want to know more because this kind of niche, you know, I want to know about women of colour. What do they? How do they identify in literature? How so? So then I went for a PhD. It was difficult to get that. But I finally found a place.

At the University of Amsterdam I've been studying and Groningen university at Amsterdam and that was also thanks to I was terribly lucky in my career.

Thanks to the fact that there was some funding for feminist research, so I got a PhD and it so it was about I decided well, women of colour. First the writers of colour, female writers of colour. And then I thought perhaps black women writers in Britain. And then I slowly, I wanted to write about Caribbean writers. A little bit. Well, I had some other topics, so mainly it was about how do women, writers of colour.

Most of an African background, African, Caribbean writers articulate their identities as black women, as as well. And yeah, all the all the other nuances. And I learned an incredible lot of it. So I went out, I went to the Caribbean, I went all over the world. And I learned an incredible lot, especially by women of colour, black women, that it was amazing eye opening for me. I was. Also engaged in still feminist work and also trying to team up with women of colour, academics of colour and was hardly anyone at the time. So we're talking about it started 1989. So I'm very old so that was mid 1990s when I when I finished my PhD and. So and I have been focusing also on the Caribbean. So of course Britain as well United States, but then the black communities, so but not much on the Netherlands, so. But I found colleagues committed. Well, fellow PhD students and other colleagues. So I thought I want to do something with it now. So I'm back in the Netherlands. So what shall I do so one of the things that we try to respond to and you're the work of Filomena as it of course about to racism. And I had been very dissatisfied with the way in which white feminism had developed because I thought that in the beginning.

We are, I think we had a firm conviction that we should be very open movement and that it is not something that white women did. I mean women of colour were already there, you know, they had been active already. So and they knew so much more about oppression than any white women. But what I found that it had become, especially when it was institutionalized as women's studies really it became whiter and whiter and whiter. So I was very much dissatisfied with that and. So what we tried to do with a few academics of colour we created an interinter-ethnic women's network and then we created a conference in 1996. It was I think. It would we try to create other epistemologies now that that would not be quite but could be shared. And it was a great success. It was really critical, really critical of the kind of intellectual epistemologies used in White Academy. The only problem was we didn't have any funding. Well, a little bit of funding and we were all very young. So most there were a lot of students there engaged and at the at the time I was finishing my graduation, my PhD and then I was looking for other work. And so I got a job in Belgium. So that was the end of the organization

we all went up so and this is open to all with organizations like that that they it was just it was just a small a small thing, a small contribution. Really modest, really modest. But I think it's an example of our small group of people come together and do something, but because there is no institutional context, no support, Philomena, as it was supporting us and that was great. But so it will fall apart. It will be an incident.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 8:01

But in your opinion, do you think establishing something for academic for people of colour, for special women of colour? Do you think it was a steppingstone in Dutch education system talking about issues related to racism, colorism as such? Or had there been talks before as well?

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 8:21

Yes, there have been. We were building. We were standing on the shoulders of other pioneers. Giants, you know, I'm talking about Philomena as it, of course. And I also think that the international influence for all of us was very important. So what was happening in the United States in black communities and very outspoken, we got all our literature from there. So for me, the Caribbean, of course, and for all the women, perhaps it could be. For example, Indian scholars, you know, with a very outspoken. Anti-racist out-view. We were standing on of the shoulders of other intellectuals and other activists as well. And I think there have been at the time it was a very lively time. So there were a lot of black women's organizations, women of colour organizing themselves in the Netherlands. So I'm thinking of flamboyant of zami, of Sister outsider. So all these small groups and. They were incredibly inspiring and they were doing cultural events. They were doing consciousness raising and that was all. In start middle 1990s, but small groups and so Philomena as a tricular and moniva as well, Ferodica Faron. So a lot of women that sometimes became more well-known later. So there was a lot going on but. The problem was that I think a little bit of separation between all the groups. And so white feminism was really getting more and more institutionalized and mainstreamed. But as the other smaller groups.

I think that you can say that the most important work happened outside the Academy, so by activists and activists of colour, women of colour who joined forces.

And created wonderful organizations and inspired so many people and laid the groundwork for the work to come. But didn't get a lot of support, didn't get a lot of.

Funding either so. That was a fight. So it what we did was just small contribution in in that kind of landscape in which there were a lot of initiatives.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 10:49

But do you think the United States had the ongoing revolutionary ideas also influenced the Netherlands in some ways during that time?

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 10:59

Absolutely, absolutely. So for example, the group sister outsider was directly influenced, of course, by Audrey Lorde. Bell Hooks was well, you know, there were so many important connections and a lot of women of colour and black colour were travelling a lot. So they knew a lot of people personally. You know, they knew Angela Davis. They knew, etcetera. You can go on and on. And so they brought this knowledge and this inspiration to the Netherlands. So I think that's incredibly important and also to knowledge of how to organize. I can see that how that works, even when we will come to talk about that diversity policies, they were inspired by what was the work that was done in the United States.

And yeah, so that was a huge example, yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 11:55

Right. You mentioned that most of the importance work happen outside with activists and other scholars, but in your opinion, since you were also student as a PhD student, do you think students and students are student initiatives in general play an important role in the process of decolonization, diversification, anti-racism?

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 12:16

Students in the Academy I was thinking about it question because you had asked me and I was thinking. I think that student. Those students demonstrations, student critique, student protests have been incredibly important, but the point is very important to change things, paramount, but the point is that they need to have the possibility to organize. And there's the trick. But they were thinking, when did I encounter the first organizations of of students of colour, of black students? And then I thought. That was only much later. So of course they were not when I started studying. And even when I was starting my PhD, it was also in the context of OSCAR, which was for me immensely important. Which was you, you will know OSCAR.

And it was very critical also based on US insight again on that kind of work, but more internationally it was inspired also by what happened elsewhere in the world in India. But people brought in different Inspiration. But. There were some and also Bella Francaila because I was both. I was hired by Bella Jaala and also member of OSCAR. So it was all kind of intertwined at the time. It was already new. So Bella Fazela also had this focus also on it was not called intersectionality yet, but also both gender and ethnicity. So and there were some. Phd, students of colour, and I've teamed up with them. The same for OSCAR. And and that gave them a kind of context. But before that, you know, there were very few students. They at the time they were called with a migrant background and they were still very much seen as kind of people who had a disadvantage because they didn't speak the language or they, you know, or they were not assimilated. That was the kind of idea. Everything goes back. I think if you look

at what happened to 1983, which was the first minority policy report in the Netherlands. Which was in itself a response to what happened in 1970. Of course, the hijacking of the train by the Moroccan Young people. So you could say that is very understandable protest of the young generation. So there's kind of activism, of course, is very tragic event. But the response was in 1983 and then, of course, the idea was we need to research these people and help them assemble but not assimilate, but help them to to articulate a kind of identity that fits into.

The Dutch society, so that they are no longer a danger to us. It can.

So and that was also to start of government research. So then you get all the minority research.

But at that, at that time, it was also very clear that there were not a lot of students, bicultural students or students with a migrant background in the university. And if they were there, they were approached as a kind of problem, which is still happening until today, you know. Which makes me very angry, yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 16:14

Yeah, I have so many questions to ask, but I just quickly wanted to ask you, which was sort of an establishment question, in your opinion, how would you define decolonization within the context of higher education in the in the Netherland?

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 16:28

Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course. It has to be. And a critique, but also an abolishment of all the the heritage of colonial thinking that is still with us in so many little details. So it's it's of all forms of racism, of course, but also the white superiority. The epistemologies that are still so suffused with colonial thought. The sense of entitlement. It's all there and then it's there in the way of teaching. It's there in, in the way in which teacher talk about students in which you find. The way with policy towards students is articulated, so all the colonial heritage that is still in it should be radically addressed and and radically work through radically done away with.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 17:26

Mm hmm, a lot of people also tend to in to to include concepts like diversification and inclusion in decolonization. Do you think these concepts tend to be counterproductive, or do you think they tend to come along together?

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 17:43

Yeah, but it's a very good question and I feel very strongly about it because it was a diversity officer, as you know, in 2014. And I was the first in the Netherlands, there was no example. Which is very strange, but the universe, because the University of Leiden is a rather conservative university, and it's well known because of its colonial past, you know, and its support of the colonial enterprise. So I thought that this was very ironic. And I was not happy

with the term diversity. Because it smacks of kind of happy multiculturalism, you know, and. It was also kind of policy that it fits the kind of neoliberal Academy that that we have. And I myself was very much in critical race theory, so that was my approach, which is of course comes from you could say, Oh well, I could think so. Yeah. So from Gloria Wekker or all the other wonderful examples. So I found it difficult and diversity in itself. And I thought, well, we are already diverse. We've always been diverse, you know, so it's much more about inclusion, but inclusion is also we like tolerance. You know we tolerate you, which is almost an aggressive thing to do Dinko Home has written a wonderful article about that. So and so inclusion is like I include you you know so it it of course it's kind of the tools that you have to work. I had to work with it because well, you know, I was much more interested in in equity, you know. So. I'm undoing injustice so, so it's not that there are some people that are somehow lacking the skills, or so we have to help them know the university puts them at a disadvantage. So creates injustice, creates a lack of equity. So that would be my position. And I try to explain that. But it's very difficult to. It's two discourses that are clashing, you know, because the whole diversity discourses. So the slogan we had is excellence through diversity.

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 20:25

So and but I you know, I applaud the vice rector. He was the one who initiated this. And I applaud what he did because it was very it was difficult like hell in our university and he was very courageous. But you had to go with the words that would be understood and supported in a neoliberal organisation. So we will become more excellent, like more successful, more money, you know, things like that.

And on the other hand, there is. I support that. I think that diversity is very good for getting a better university, but not necessarily in the forms of success that other people might associate with that. For me, it's about justice about growing together, you know, learning from each other. So that learning perspective for me growing together, you know, caring for each other, things like that. Is togetherness so it's a clash of two days courses.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 21:26. You also about how Leiden University has a huge role in in the colonial past. Do you mind explaining a little bit more and how it's perceived right now in the current context?

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 21:27

So.

Yeah. Yeah, well, of course.

The colonial project is supported by the universities and Leiden university.

Well, what I see predominantly, I'm from the humanities. So what I see that it had an immense stake in in linguistics. So to learn about many colonial languages, the languages in the colonised

territories, you know, so that is the one thing that I do is very good at. So that was a way of supporting the colonial project. So and it may be very many other things but this was for me something that is outstanding. Well outstanding that stood out. And I found that when I so that was 19th century.

And they had a name. They had a reputation in that. I don't know exact dates, so I should perhaps study that closer, but when I came in Leiden university that was in 2000. I became member of the of the Group of Colonial and post colonial studies, which is already interesting. You know, colonial and post colonial studies. And it's also I was interested because of course at the time decolonial as the term didn't exist yet. So that was post colonial studies. What I did. And so there was a group of white men.

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 23:10

But but some of them are just wonderful, you know? I mean, it's it's not as if I think they're no, it's an and they've had this philological and historical outlook, you know, and there I came with a critical race perspective. So I saw kind of continuation of the tradition. And I also saw that some people were trying to move beyond.

But ot also showed a gap with what I was doing. So so it was still there. In a way, this kind ofy Yeah, the trace is the heritage. So that's, that's what I mean, yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 23:47

Hmm, also a lot of scholars also, while carrying out my research mentioned about how classrooms are inherently very colonial in spaces based on how knowledge are being produced. But at the same time it's also a site for revolutionary ideas to flourish. And in your opinion, with your, with your, with your wonderful academic successful academic journey, in your opinion, do you think what is your perspective on classrooms to foster decolonal perspective?

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 24:14

Oh, oh, yeah. Well, is ideal space. It's an ideal space. I love teaching. It's one of the things that I miss incredibly right now. I'm still in touch with some of my students, you know? But. Miracles could happen, you know, not because of me, but because of my students. And then. And of course, it may be the place that students come together and meet people with very different backgrounds and very many ways from their own background, and they can reach out and find connection they find, can find solidarity, being heard by other people. And it all depends, of course, on how you teach. You can say, OK, now I'm going to tell you so. And so I'm going. I'm going to explain some theory to you. But if you bring open up the space and make it possible for students to talk and engage into dialogue with each other and to listen to listen, but also to find the courage to open up, and to speak, and then then know that other students will not dismiss you or humiliate you because it is a safe space. Now I think it's ideal. The problem is that of

course in the society in the university that we are in. You know, is all the problems that we have, the shortages, teachers etcetera. It's very difficult to have the the group size that allows that. It's a very. So I was teaching something that was called Interculturality language. It was kind of anti racism, crash course, but I it was kind of packaged something else. So that in the end we could talk about yes, but in the beginning it was. I wanted to get them slowly at the point. Much has changed in 20 years for the good, but at a certain moment I had 60 students in the classroom. You can't do that. So then I just. Decided to teach two groups. Without funding, so I just separated and that was so then you could talk and that was that was really good. Really useful, yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 26:44

And and in terms of challenges, you mentioned somewhere along fundings became one of the problems in terms of teaching, but other institutional problems, what sort of problems have you, did you encounter well trying to install or also trying to foster decolonial perspective?

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 26:57

Yeah.

Yeah. Well, again, I've been very, very lucky because when I came in in Leiden.

I was part of a young team that was so I came as I think. Well, the first addition to the team because it was it was a a professor and so now who was new there and but I knew him because he was also a member of OSCAR, a very active member and.

And all the people that were brought in, most of them, had affiliations with OSCAR or the kind of thing and a kind of critical thinking. So we were a kind of group that that was already based on critical theory, critical thinking.

We didn't call it intersectionality yet, but it's so we decided already. We are going to talk about interculturality. That was the name we use an intermediality. And so these are the two focus points, and we're going to mix them all the time. But we're going. So that meant we're going to talk about race. We're going to talk about these issues. So I did come into Leiden a kind of conservative colonial institute that was inimical to what I did. But some when I went outside and I did a lect lecture on the Postcolonialism at a time. Then I got a lot of students who were outraged with me. How dare you say that colonialism is a bad thing? It is a very important and the so. And it was.

But.

But this was kind of I was in a. It was not just safe space, but was inspiring space. So to give you courage to do what you really wanted to do. And I was hired because of the things that I was doing already and with the activist kind of so yeah.

I love that, of course, and I had a task to create a whole programme, you know, from bachelor, the master to I. I created a PhD platform for the Netherlands, really wonderful. And even

Belgium. Yes, yes. Yeah. With a very wonderful colleague from Flander. So yeah. So no, I felt that I had the freedom to do everything I want. I also felt that the institution was around us. And so. But we were protected by the professor, so that it was good. And there were some other people, some young people, came up in the other department so we could work together, you know, and slowly. We had a great network in University of Leiden, yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 29:42

Right. But in your opinion, why is that decolonial perspective is important for students? Do you think it's important and why?

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 29:50

Oh well, it's yes, of course it's. Especially nowadays, you know, I'm so worried about what's happening here with kind of incredible, right extremist, racist, fascist groups that are on the rise worldwide. And it seems that people don't have the language anymore to counter it. And so we need to teach students or share it with them, because very often they have the insights, but sometimes not all the words and and for all students. For students of colour might benefit from a vocabulary to resist or to to fight if to. Or to understand that they're not mad, that they're not crazy, that it is the world that's crazy out there and.

What students need is to break loose from their madness, so the white madness. Kind of, yeah. The madness of white supremacy and to break free from that and no longer be mad and handicapped and isolated from the global majority. I I love that term. We had a speaker, Barbara Love, and she used that and I thought, oh, wonderful, you know, because my people always think that they are the majority. They're absolutely not, you know. So I think that we need to do away with all these madness and and the prejudice and and to help people develop a vocabulary and perhaps they will have their own words, but then they can share that as well, you know, to to work towards that. So that they can become more stronger, defend themselves, and perhaps become active in a way that will save the world, yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 31:53

In, in spite of all the madness that is going in the world to what is what do you think is the role of students in decolonization of education institutions?

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 32:02

Yeah. Well, of course there's students, and I've met a lot of students who were isolated alone. And they were happy with the kind of teaching, the kind of classes that I was teaching, but also other colleagues, of course because they recognise something and that they found. But I couldn't ask them anything because they there were so few when I was starting teaching, so they couldn't even connect to other people because they were always the only one in class, you

know? So what could they do? So it would be kind of cruel to ask them to do something.

But what I see if there is kind of context for getting together, what they will do, because they will do is come together and will create this place in which they can grow and heal. Perhaps that's what I saw in the in Leiden the students came together.

And sometimes it it was also the organisation of the educational programme so that you have a programme that was organised according to the topic of your study, for example, it might be Africa or a certain region in Asia and then students who weren't interested in that region, not necessarily because of their own background, but they were interested. So they came together and I saw that that was also an excellent context for organisation, but also students created their own apart from that, organisations. When I was diversity Officer, that was one of the things that I loved most to support groups that were either kind of self organising already or that just needed a context so or funding. So I I love that most. So students need a context and they need a cause like I think in 2015 you had the student protests in Amsterdam, but it was also in the in Leiden the new university. And that was against neoliberal university, but also the demand for democratisation. And so it was already moving into the direction of the protests for decolonization in 2018.

But it was then, and that created a context again, but then that fell apart, you know. And of course, like what we did when I was much younger. You have a group of young people and they are not paid. They don't have jobs. But then they get jobs, you know, and they they move away or the organisation just falls apart because people have to study. People have to work or anything. So that's that's the problem. So I think it's very, very important if that student's organised. It's also because the neoliberal, the university doesn't. Neoliberalism doesn't want you to organise, it wants you to suffer individually and to pay, you know.

And pick up the part of the whole.

The way of neoliberal think in the market and they don't. Yeah, sorry. Yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 35:27

OK. Do you think that the Black Lives movement that happened in 2020 to 2022, do you think that also helped increase awareness protests in Dutch universities in particular?

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 35:38

Absolutely. I wanted to mention that, yeah, absolutely. And yeah, yeah, yeah.

That's what I said. So students need so you cannot just organise, you know, you you just sit there and say, OK, let's do something together. That doesn't help. You know, you need

something that's going on. So in Black Lives Matter has been incredibly important. Yes. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. It's a little bit. When I was looking back at the whole history, I thought.

When you look at what's happening in the university, it was when women's studies became institutionalised, then it became gender studies. At a certain moment, and almost always, if you look at the way in which it's institutionalised, ethnicity became a part of it. So that happened in Amsterdam and it happened in Utrecht and it happened in other. It happened in Maastricht. I was thinking of other examples so.

This was a way of forms of emancipation that the kind of cluster.

This kind of intersectional thinking that then started to to shape. So it's it's again, it's emancipation. Yeah, it's it's always of course broader than just one cause.

So yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 36:58

Yeah, if I understood correctly, the mostly the discussions mostly started in the Netherlands in relation to feminism and then how it sort of became institutionalised and then different sort of concepts started to unfold over time from gender studies to ethnic studies to sort of and so on.

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 37:17

Yeah, but it that was that was only one. One development, of course, but if I just look at what's happening within the Academy, then that's what I see. But a lot of things were happening outside the Academy and they had they were purely black movements in the Academy. And I think of the the struggle to get the slavery monument, the struggle to put slavery on the agenda in a way, so that also women women's movement was engaged with that. And and was really able to create a larger movement to get that slavery monument . Of course, the the Institute. So that was kind of separate. But outside the Academy. And of course, you had the in the 1980s you had for a very short time, you had the Centre for race and Ethnic studies in Amsterdam with Chris Mallard. You will know about that, which was critical race.

Studies.

Umm, but it was focused on on on the issue on not there was no connection. Well there was a connection but no open or explicit connection in the title. But as you know that was replaced by a mainstream white institute of Immigration Migration Studies with white men who were directing that so it was also there.

Studies of race, racism. It was already there, separate from gender studies, but there are different movements and yeah, so it's important to see that it's not just one movement, a lot of things are happening and they're connected, not always to each other, but to an order. And the most important things were happening.

The most inspiring things, perhaps the most activist things, were happening outside the mainstream university.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 39:21

It's important for students and faculty used to collaborate together to to, to embrace decolonial learning environment. Do you think it's it's there needs to be collaboration?

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 39:31

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. We're students and staff, and I think, but it happens, I think I see a lot of mutual support, because I think that staff members, teachers are very much. Their eyes are opened by what they heard here from their students.

And at least that's in my case. You know, I should pay my students because I shouldn't be paid for teaching. I should pay them. But they taught me so much about that. But then again, of course I could offer them theoretical discourses for examples or activists that point them to other traditions they didn't know. So it's kind of dialogue. So.

There's a kind of mutual yeah, respect inspiration. So yeah, I I think that happens if you touch each other's hearts or minds then then this is what happens. And this is what it should be. Yeah. No, absolutely. And also because.

Oh.

Students can be so terribly alone. And of course COVID was terrible in that sense. But when you're a student of colour and you're in the university that isn't respecting you isn't acknowledging your perspective or your emotions.

So you shouldn't be alone. You should find people who support you. If staff member students, as many people as you can.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 41:03

Right. Yeah, I have one more question. Thank you so much for that wise word. It really means a lot and you're in your vision. How do you, how do you look into as as a as a perfect decolonial curriculum or a curriculum? How do you invasion decolonial in a curriculum?

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 41:19

Yeah.

Yeah. Oh.

Oh, that's a good idea, but it it would take a lifetime to answer that, I think because, but also because there's not one curriculum. Of course it it, it would depend on is it an interdisciplinary context in in which you're working? Is it with ideally, of course it would be.

Would it be a bachelor or a minor or something like that? And what kind of or a master?

Well, I've been experimenting so much with with all that. I think kind of basic point is that students should have a very active role. It should be a place in which students can connect and

talk about what moves them. That should be the point of departure.

I try to convey that during my. So this is so you're studying, not for for society, yes, but you're studying also for you because your feelings and your experiences are the most important thing you have to because that's your source for whatever you will bring to society or to other people. That's the source. So the trouble, the problems that you went through or perhaps the Enlightenment that you experienced, the wonderful moments, that's the source of what you can bring to other people later in your career.

So I think that should be a beginning.

That should be a kind of basic principle.

So it's, well, that's a principle. It's not kind of curriculum. The books are the theories or whatever.

And I think it will develop, you know, it should engage with what's happening in the world. That's very important right now.

With all the protests movement. Black moved Black Lives Matter, but also.

And with the horrors that are kind of emerging right now to face that. Talk a lot about resistance movement. So what has happened in the past that can help us now, but other less things like that. So give hope, Gives you the tools. Gives you the vocabulary, but also scrutinise vocabularies you know.

Share vocabularies.

But it's in the place where your family lives. Or you come from or or you will go back to or the places where you want to go. What are the vocabulary, the vocabularies that are useful? Things like that. So you should work with the group. You should work with the historical moment. Things will change all the time and you should of course not have the kind of. The White Post colonial Canon. That was useful in the 80s and 90s, but you should move on and focus on the voices of wonderful people from, well, all over the world, from the global majority were activists and intellectuals.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 44:53

Thank you so much, Doctor Hoving. I just wanted to quickly take a few more minutes also to talk to you personally off the record, but I one thing I I I forgot to ask you tell you before the interview was that if you would like to remove or at any point of the interview then you could also tell me if I would. If you want me to exclude any information.

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 44:59

Yeah.

Yeah, yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 45:16

But for the final remark, I was wondering if it's OK to use your name in my research or if you would like to use any pseudo name if you have any preference.

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 45:27

In in principle it's OK.

I would like perhaps to see the text just to see whether I said something completely stupid. For now, I think I said what just what I feel so.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 45:40

Definitely with I say.

Hoving, I. (Isabel) 45:41

I think it's OK. So and it's not, it will not be new to people who know me. So yeah.

Appendix 4: Dr. Katrine Smiet interview transcript

SEPR Saswot Shankar Shrestha

Duration: 43:41

16th February 2024

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 0:07

I'm just gonna dive in with the purpose of the interview is to gain insight into the development of decolonization, in particular with higher Dutch higher education, but also gain insight into your work and how you approach decolonization of education. But I just wanted to start off with a general question about.

About about you. If you could give me a brief overview about your academic background and your current and your current role at the university.

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 0:34

Yes. So I'm Katrina Smith, of course. I'm educated in philosophy and in gender studies. I got my PhD in 2017 with a dissertation on Debates on intersectionality within feminist scholarship, so I'm quite interdisciplinary scholar grounded now in Philosophy department, but I've also worked in gender studies at Utrecht University, for instance.

And right now I'm an assistant professor at Radboud University, and I'm also the coordinator of a bachelor programme there called Philosophy, Politics and Society. So that's a new role for me since January.

Yeah, I think that's relevant. I'm also for some years involved in.

How to diversify the curriculum within our philosophy department.

I had a small appointment for that and I developed a project around on learning which is kind of an entry point to think about what are, what are we teaching? Why are we teaching that?

How are we teaching, you know? Yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 1:44

Right, I think this connects to my another question which is about how would you define decolonization, decolonization in the context of Dutch higher education.

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 2:02

Yeah.

So I definitely think that the discussion around decolonizing the university decolonizing the curriculum has been going on for a few years now, and I connect that very much to student movements. So for me, the the occupation of the master house at UVA, that happened I think in. Yeah, I don't remember actually when it happened 2015 or so was a really important moment because that's also a moment where the connection was made between lack of transparency and democracy within university students, student fees, student debt, kind of, and the question of what actually is on the menu? It's like what's being taught at the university and

which voices are included and which voices are excluded. So I think the the, the University of Colour organisation and and their place within that moment of student protest really put this on the agenda and then the the work of the committee of The diversity at UVA really brought also decolonising as a as a lens like next to diversifying. So what I think the framework of Decolonising does is that it provides a much more fundamental critique. Then the work of diversity, right? So I think we generally can see that diversity, a lot of good work can be done under the label of diversity, but it is a very mainstreamed and a very often very depoliticized and a very bureaucratized framework, right, in which diversity means, OK, here's the Canon or here's the curriculum. And then we can add something we can be inclusive, we can broaden let's say, whereas what for me, decolonization says is no wait, its about adding something to an existing to something that already stands firmly in place, but it's actually about saying, what is that based on and what violence or historical inequality and violence oppression is kind of at the heart of things as we know them, let's say, so decolonizing as the call for decolonizing is not a call for broadening or including, but a call for really questioning the foundations. Or in this case, let's say the curriculum or the university as an institution, yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 4:55

Right. There are also like very diverse definition of how one can define decolonizations and you know concepts like inclusion, diversity or diversification tend to come together. And somewhere along those line I wanted to ask you, do you think these concepts like diversity, inclusion tend to be counterproductive, who the concept of decolonization or do you think they come together?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 5:04

Yes.

I think that.

They do stand in attention with each other, but they can also be mobilised productively so I think I have a very pragmatic approach to these type of concepts. So for instance here I'm Inspired by the work of Robin Big Man who looks at the evolution, let's say of the field of women's studies into gender studies and then to intersectionality studies, kind of saying, you know, the introduction of the term gender was supposed to provide a new entry point to provide a new frame, but then that term had to do all that work, whereas yeah, the term can't do all the work for us. So. It doesn't really matter. I think that can be very critical work done under the umbrella of diversity and very critical work, and the same with decolonization. So it depends on how you mobilise these terms and how you set them to work, let's say, and what epistemology, epistemological, political forces behind that, so I am not a person who would be. Say like. Oh, yeah, diversity. That's that's that's per definition mainstream or? I think it can be a very strategic entry point and it can speak a language that university administrators also want to speak or can

hear and that can be your entry point to do something else.

Of course, there's always the risk of competition and always the risk of being kind of, yeah, being mainstreamed or being brought in and then a new term emerges. And that term has to do has to carry on that weight, let's say.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 7:17

Exactly. And also with there's been, you know, rise of EDI committees in most of the universities and and and so on. But I wanted to gain more insight into how did this concept of decolonization actually emerged in Dutch high education. You mentioned something about how gender studies was developed with women studies and so on and so forth. But based on your academic career, how do you see this unfolded in Dutch higher education?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 7:24

Yes.

Yes.

Honestly, I yeah, I I already mentioned the moment of the the student protest at the Matthew House. I also think that of course the Rhodes must fall and the other fallist movements in South Africa were really important in shifting a-frame there.

So I definitely see that within the last 10 years, yeah, 10 years, I would say there has been a kind of broader. A broader reception of well, both critical race, critical philosophy of race, critical race perspectives, the colonial theory, the decolonial perspectives and it has kind of been, yeah. Found an audience within.

Within critical fields like gender studies first and foremost, but then also actually broaden out. So I think that when I started working on intersectionality in feminism, but also then with critical race perspectives in I, I think I started my Phd in 2012. This was very niche or this was very wasn't a very broad topic of attention but now if I say the word intersectionality, everyone knows what I'm talking about. So there has been a kind of shift of vocabulary also in the public arena in the Netherlands, like a lot more attention for the history of enslavement. You know the history of colonialism and this, of course also has has entered into the university like, OK, we we need to pay attention to this. So we need to think about in what ways are we shaped by those histories and in what ways can we relate critically to that? Or do we need to?

Yeah. Find another space, let's say.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 9:56

Right. You mentioned about the the student movement in UVA. How did the university react to this protest?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 10:08

Let's see. Do you? What do you know about the? Do you know about this protest?

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 10:13

I was not aware about this process.

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 10:14

OK. Or you should really look into it and should really, really read up a bit about it. So it's the Maagdenhuis building. I can, I can put it in the chat. So it's actually it was a reference to an earlier student protest in a in a in an interesting way because in the 70s one of the most iconic, yeah, I think 60s or 70s, one of the most iconic moments of student protest was this occupation of the Maagdenhuis. The main building of the University of Amsterdam. Students kind of occupying the building and now in the twenty 10's I don't remember the date but they again, went to that iconic space and occupied the building for a few weeks, so there was really banners students staying over creating teach insurance inviting. Yeah, inviting speakers, creating a kind of other university on the university from below, let's say Umm and.

This, of course, was very troublesome to the UvA. And it was, there was negotiation or, you know, they needed those students to to leave. So but and I think in the end they were evicted, they were taken out. You know, of course they wouldn't. But then it also became the the incentive for a committee to be formed to investigate diversity at UvA and Gloria Wekker was the chair of that committee.

And also some of the active leaders of that student movement also were invited in somehow, so their voice was heard. But then of course, was it really heard or was it just? Enough. Did they get some space to write a report and then it it disappeared into a drawer forever. So I think, yeah, for me that's a very important moment because that's a moment where we really say No democratisation without decolonization. I think that was really on one of those banners and really connecting so many dots of saying like you know. Decolonization is at the heart of this.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 12:48

Right. Uh, you mentioned about how roads must fall, movement fees must fall. Movement from South Africa. Do you think that these movements happening across the world also in the United States tend to influence what's happening in the Netherlands with the students? Do you think there is a connection?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 13:04

Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

And rightly so, right? It's really like.

In the case of the, the roads must fall movement, it's something where we see very obvious, but it's like. There can also be a a a tendency of saying like Oh yeah, this is a very African problem or this is a very American problem?

But when it comes to the history of colonisation, we're all involved, so also in the colonial metropole, right? So then to see the what's happening in South Africa and say, oh, that's about us, or that's about us too and saying. I think that's what happened there that that, this student movement in South Africa really ignited a recognition and a solidarity like across many spaces. And then a recognition that, Oh no, it's not about being in solidarity with them over there, but about seeing how we also are in the same puzzle, let's say, and and also our universities are a colonial. Or. They carry the the the the history in them as well and then move from there, yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 14:41

Yeah, in in connection with students, do you think?

In your perspective, what is the role of students in decolonization of education institutions and also in context of the Netherlands?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 14:53

Students who are the spark or kind of the ones who who set this going right because they demand they they they insist like for a different education and on the one hand, of course, this can play into also very new liberal kind of students as clients, kind of we're paying for education. We do we we have a right to kind of what we receive as as education, yes, that's I think I definitely see that. But on the other hand, it's also students who are. Yeah, really critically interrogating what education they're receiving and freezing, interrogating also the power structures in that.

And it can really become. Also it a kind of antagonism between students and professors, of students and teachers, where the students are the ones kind of demanding change, and then the professors are the gatekeepers for that change are the ones who kind of. Hold the Fort. So I think the most productive.

Path is 1 in which students and staff work together because we have a common interest, but it that that requires also for professors or teachers to give up some of the power that they hold as the ones who design education, execute education. We are kind of the boss over the curriculum, right? What would it mean to really have student voice at the table? Really had take student concerns central kind

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 16:44

Could you give me an example how this collaboration could take place between students and faculty?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 16:50

Yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 16:50

Or or in your case of your own curriculum.

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 16:53

Yeah. Yeah, so.

An example of how it's already happening.

It's a little bit harder.

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 17:12

No. I think for instance also in, in, in the bathhouse occupation. I think it was also a lot of.

Staff like in solidarity with the student movement, right?

And joining in and and for instance giving a teach in on this topic I see it also happening now in the in the Palestine Movement and the way it's also happening in our university, right, we have very big teachings happening at Raudbould University and there we see that it's staff and students organising together from their perspective, situativeness kind of. Its staff, who can kind of Yeah, who can maybe bring some expertise, invite colleagues with expertise on a topic to give the teaching. But then students are the ones also rallying around it, organising around it.

Yeah, maybe that's a good example of where it is happening. In the in the in the movement against the war and for ceasefire

And then maybe in, in, in, in how I would see that in in my own programme or in the way that I look at education is. Yeah, I told you a bit about this project I've got going on around unlearning so. I'm applied for applied for a grant for an action research project that would actually turn four courses two at a time within the the programme into sites for unlearning and what that means is that it is a kind of site of experimentation. Site of, yeah, trying out new things, questioning business as usual. And then we work with this unlearning collective that consists of students and teachers that make up ideas for how we're going to do things differently within that course and then actually all students enrolled in the course are co researchers in that project and we through the semester. Kind of together, investigate what would it mean to unlearn? And within this context of that specific course, right. And so it's kind of an

experimental way of teachers giving up some of their control, students stepping in and taking more agency in that in their learning experience and making this also a site for yeah research and reflection on what happens when we try to shake things up and do things differently. How? How do? Yeah, what works? What doesn't work? What kind of unlearning tools can we generate that might be useful in other contexts? Yeah, that's the plan.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 20:15

Mm hmm, right. And that is one thing I find really interesting on your project about the concept of unlearning, but also through my literature review I hear different concepts like delinking from decolonial school. And there's this colonial who talk about reimagining and there's subaltern studies who are talking about something else.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 20:33

Do you think it's important for students to capture all these essence in order to understand decolonization? Or is it actually about decolonising our own mind, our own minds?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 20:51

Maybe when you say this, my first reaction is. If doing decolonization turns into doing like a super thorough, you know, very abstract literature study of all the different conceptualizations that exist out there. Then maybe we kind of lost the point a bit and then of course, for me as a scholar, it's very interesting to see the differences between the post colonial and the decolonial approach and to see like, where Mignolo approach of delinking actually stand in tension with what I understand with Spivak as unlearning, I think it's something very different for me, but in practise, it matters how we do it and in practise or or or how we how we work with that and how we work with and against kind of and the structures that we are always already embedded within.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 21:57

But do you think do you think that you know, with these new emerging theories and decolonization or decolonality itself is creating a new Canon in this discussion? Or do you think this is a risk?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 21:58

Yeah.

Yeah, I do think so.

Yeah.

Yeah. And you can create a just a new jargon or a new can actually just also be. Yeah. We be again the kind of old wine and new bottles. Yeah. Yeah. And I honestly, I think, but but I you've read the the editorial I think for me one of the biggest risks of specifically, the decolonial approach is that it that's also it's huge its biggest attraction or temptation is the idea that it is possible to delink completely to step away from to to to to have this rupture and to leave behind coloniality/modernity. And I know there's more nuance there, but the impetus of the decolonial gesture for me really hinges on that, on that promise that that is possible. And you know, being more schooled in postcolonial theory, I really doubt that. I really think that that this is too easy or this is too too simple then as if we, you know. Can really step away from that. So I think that the postcolonial approach, which really says no colonialism created this wound. This wound is like there. We can't ignore it, but we also can't kind of undo it. That is, and even when the wound heals, there's a scar, and the scar is a trace. And it's always there. Yeah, that's why I am hesitant by some ways in which this decolonial rhetoric is being mobilized because it proposes also decolonizing actually as something much simpler or easier than what I think it actually is.

What is it to unlearn? Like, what is it to unlearn Eurocentrism? where do you even start? Like, this is an impossibility. Like it's a huge dilemma or it is really. Yeah, it's something so vast, let's say, and I think the way in which I tend to illustrate that is through the work of an artistic researcher, a colleague of mine, Aneta Kraus, she works at the University of Vienna and also at Haka UDA, the art school in Utrecht. She has done a lot of research on on learning, and I I really have been in conversation with her about this and one of the first experiments that she did with this was to get together with a group of people, and this is like 10 years ago. She got together with a group of people and for a three day workshop, they set themselves to the task unlearning how to ride a bike and like this, of course, is really funny and really absurd and really ridiculous. But it's exactly that example that shows us like you know, what would you do if you want to unlearn how to ride a bike, how would you? Why would you start? Well, how this is impossible like. This like you know, it's even. It's even a saying, like, you can't. You can't once you once you have this skill, it's in, it's in embodied and you kind of can always fall back on it. Well, what would it mean if you say OK? But now I want to I want to work against that or I want to unlearn that. And through that very a vivid example of unlearning how to ride a bike. I think Aneta shows us. You know. The challenge that we are faced with. Cause, if you wanna unlearn your centrism. Yeah, it's more abstract, but it's as kind of embedded in us as the skill of riding a bike, maybe even more somehow. So yeah.

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 26:19

Facing to this impossibility facing to this.

To this. Yeah, facing to that impossibility. I think that's the challenge of Decolonising or the challenge of unlearning. And we know it might not be possible or that actually the task is so ridiculous or, you know, or so, so impossible. And still we have to try at it again and keep going at it and and work work at it kind of.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 26:49

Mm hmm, in relation with unlearning umm can you can you define how would you actually conceptualise unlearning? But particularly in the case of in the classroom setting?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 27:04

Yeah. So I kind of shy away from really defining it too much because I think it can be many different things. I'm of course inspired by Spivak in in picking up this term.

And Spivak already in the subalterns speak in the 80s kind of says in order to hear that muted voice, the voice of the subaltern, the Subalterness woman, the Western intellectual needs to learn to learn from below, or it needs to unlearn a specific epistemic habit, let's say. So for me, I'm learning is about epistemic habits. It's about institutional structures. It's about everyday practises. It's about kind of questioning that, and I'm always using this term, which I don't like because I think it's ableist, but it's about kind of starting to see the contours of your own blind spots, right? They like, there are certain blind spots and if we start to see where they are and and how they are shaped, then we are maybe one step towards seeing something else.

So. Unlearning is about starting to question that and starting to question it not only in the abstract, but also in the practise, also in the in the institutional, the political, yeah, and starting to starting a process of kind of unravelling that. Yeah, Spivak of course is is someone who is keeps on being very vague with that and also later can text a bit more distance from the term. But she gives us a lot of interesting.

Yeah. And gives material to think through and to think with, so for instance, the phrase I'm learning your privilege as your loss. So privilege is something which gives access privilege benefits kind of opens up a certain world, but in doing so also closes down towards other ways of being and knowing it makes creates a blockage kind of towards other ways of being and knowing and and and.

You know what does it mean to unlearn your privilege? Well, the first thing is to start to see it as a loss. I know. And it doesn't erase it automatically. Make it go away. But it makes you kind of aware of or relate to that differently.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 30:00

. That's I'm. I'm very amused by hearing with you with your thoughts. But I wanted to ask you, do you think classroom in particular serves as an important place to foster decolonial? If not decolonial like the way to unlearn perspectives.

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 30:13

Hmm hmm.

Oh, absolutely, absolutely, yeah.

Maybe just because I'm a teacher, that this is the space where I would pick this up. I don't think. I definitely don't think it's the only space. But I think it is an important space because I think that education is a place of in which both norms get solidified passed on, you know to another generation, but also space where a shift can happen or like an opening up can happen. Yeah, yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 30:55

Mm hmm.

Mm hmm.

Some scholars also tend to see classrooms as a colonial spaces, but also as a, you know, a revolutionary site. So it can mean the context of Netherlands, Leiden University or, I don't know, Utrecht. But they they have contributed in colonial legacies per se, but in your perspective, as you work in unlearning, how do you approach in in universities, particularly in the Netherlands, which has so much colonial legacy?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 31:08

Yes, yes, yes.

Yes.

Hmm.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 31:31

How do you tell students to unlearn this?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 31:33

Yeah. Yeah. So this is where I think telling is not the right frame, right? Because you you know it's about creating in the classroom and and within. Within a programme or within a group, or within a specific moment, a space where something else can happen. And I don't do that alone. I don't do. It's not me, kind of the agent of that.

But I as a teacher, I have we we come together in the classroom and we all have bring with us kind of our own personal histories, our own, you know, the ways in which we're situated through webs of power. And then we in that moment, we, we are together in a community and every the teacher has a different role from the student, carries a different responsibility. But in that encounter, I think something, something else can happen or that's the hope somehow, right?

And it requires kind of investment from all parties in yeah, staying with the trouble like to use

heroic expression or kind of. Yeah, seriously and playfully. And you know, and in that position kind of trying to trying to meet each other and meet the text. In this case. I mean, I'm very text based person. So there. Yeah. So and then the question is?

What happens in that space of encounter or what can what? What else could happen? Let's say that is not knowledge transfer top down hierarchy kind of this is an established truth with capital T and you need to learn this because it's going to be on the exam and you need to regurgitate it back to me so that you know I can be affirmed in and we can all create the same circle, let's say. So for me that's also really about pedagogy or about how do we shape that encounter? What's power? Our teachers, you know, what power are they willing to give up or what responsibilities do they need to hold on to?

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 34:10

Right. But in in, in, in your, in your classrooms, what sort of challenges or concerns do you foresee in integrating these sort of norms about unlearning/decolonizing within students while also in the context of university and and in general?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 34:26

Yeah. What challenges? So my biggest challenge is maybe not in my own classroom, it's actually within my colleagues, so you know, I work in the philosophy department. It's very traditional discipline. There is, among colleagues, some kind of willingness to say, Oh yeah, we should of course not only teach all dead white men, you know, maybe students are asking for something else. So, OK, OK. But also, like, a big fear to really engage that and a question of, like, expertise. But I'm an expert on Aristotle. So what else can I teach? But then the question is: For me, unlearning is so much more and I think this is also what I really take from here. Like it's not about stop reading Kant, and spit on Hegel, like, let it all go, but it's about how do we read that and how do we engage that and why and asking that question and inviting students in to ask that question and daring to try something else.

So my challenge is to generate among my colleagues an openness towards this kind of change and a willingness to let go of some of their traditional kind of power of their role as teacher.

And how do we kind of? Because I think teachers, they have a lot of power there that they don't always realise or that they kind of or realise but very much take for granted and not willing to give up.

And what would it mean to work against the grain there

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 36:20

Right. And yeah, also with the concept of decolonization, it's such a fuzzy word, and some people tend to avoid using it and then also over time I've learned, like, you know, not all scholars from global South side like amazing or needs to be incorporated. But how do we right.

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 36:34

No, no. Oh, you've learned this? Yep.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 36:38

But how do we actually integrate these colleagues as you mentioned, or these professors into spaces where we can have discussions? Or how do we approach in in while meeting these kind of people?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 36:50

Yeah.

So what I try to do is I try to be very non threatening.

So I think with variance and within feminism, right Saha Ahmed writes about this figure of the feminist killjoy. The one who kind of doesn't laugh at the joke, who ruins the good atmosphere, who is like, who is really pointing to the sore spot, and I really I think we need a lot of killjoys, but I'm not the killjoy because the killjoy is the one who also. Yeah, I start rolling. Oh, there we have her again. She can't shut up about it. Kind of. So I try to be bit sneaky and try to kind of bring people in and say and and and then invite them into to and no matter how small that shift can be, it's still something. Or it. It makes it still can make a difference.

What was your question? Why did I start about this? Yeah. So. So yeah, I just. I just try to do this in a way that actually both that's that speaks the language of the university while trying to subvert it at the same time. So yes, I wrote an application now in January for a big grant like €100,000 in order to get that grant, I need to convince the educational professionals that, you know, I have this all theorised and I have it all solid and there's a plan of evaluation. You know, I can play the game, but then if I get this money, then I'm going to take the money and run. And run really fast. You know, in another direction and try to do my stuff with it. And of course he has. Then it comes like, you know, I'm. I'm gonna be accountable about it, but I I just think that that we have to.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 38:47

Mm hmm.

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 39:01

That's this kind of working with and against the institution and and trying to carve out the spaces and trying to, you know, sit at the table and always kind of still stay in touch with, OK, but why and and what is the space for change then.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 39:27

Definitely. I I definitely take that point to my heart. It's mostly I see it as like you do good, but then you sort of backstab on the institution, but in a way that would benefit them. The the majority sort of.

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 39:36

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. So maybe give you a funny example. I organised the workshop for colleagues and students a while back and the workshop description was like, super neutral, like we're gonna talk about diversity and inclusion within the first year curriculum, blah blah and then they all came and I put, I put some pressure. I was like, Oh yes, it would be great if you come. And I got this group together and then we did this very intense.

Workshop where we. Yeah, maybe it's too long to say, but it we use the the family constellations or the systemic constellations to kind of visualise like different roles within the classroom or leave different roles within the system and it was not at all what anyone was expecting there and it was really like, oh, what what? What am I being asked to do to feel something or to, you know, but by kind of I create a certain goodwill kind of take them in and then I hope that I'm able to shift something and do something else. And of course the element of surprise was with me here. I can't keep doing that because they're going to be on to me, but no, no, but this is this thing I see. There's a lot of people who also want some change but also don't have any idea where to start it or where to do it. And then the question is if I position myself as one who knows better and one who can kind of tell to others, this is how you should do it. Then I don't think I really reached that much. If I say we are together here to unlearn, what do you want to unlearn? How could we start then we have a different entry point.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 41:25

OK.

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 41:26

Yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 41:26

Alright, I have one more question before I I we can close it off. I wanted to ask you how do you envision a decolonial curricula in education? What is, how would it look like?

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 41:29

Yes.

Yeah.

Umm.

Or maybe the first thing. Of course, in my field of philosophy, it wouldn't be the same canon of old the dead white men. So there would be a more variation in kind of in the yeah types of both in the author we read the type of text we read and in how we read them? And I maybe also think that an important element there is the Co creation of the curriculum by teachers and students by all participants, let's say, right, so that maybe a curriculum is not set in stone for the next 5-10 hundred years, but it's actually co produced and gonna say OK, but where? Where do we want to put our attention to the coming period, what can this teacher offer us? What can that teacher offer us? Where what do we need? What kind of tools, methods, approach do we need to to achieve? You know, the learning goals we want to achieve?

So I guess my view of the Decolonised curriculum is also one that is actually flexible and open and is responsive to what's happening in the world in that moment?

Yeah, yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 43:24

Mm hmm mm.

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 43:27

Yeah.

Shrestha, S.S. (Saswot) 43:29

Yeah, I think that that really means a lot like that's I think what we should aim for. But thank you so much, Dr Katrine. But I'm gonna stop the interview so that we can talk off the record.

Smiet, K.B. (Katrine) 43:34

Yeah.

OK. Yes.

Appendix 5: Dr. Sandra Rios Oyola Interview Transcript

SEPR Saswot Shankar Shrestha

Duration: 40:41

12th February 2024

Interviewer: Thank you very much for participating in this interview. Um, the purpose of this research is to gain insights from faculty members from University College Roosevelt to understand the process of decolonization in higher education, particularly in the context of UCR. Since you have signed up the consent form, I would still like to address that If you would like to withdraw your name or any information in any time of the interview, then you can. personally contact me after the interview. Um, I would like to start with a general question. Um, could you briefly give me an overview of your academic background and your current role at the university?

Interviewee: Yeah. Um, so I am, uh, I have a PhD in Sociology from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. My research has dealt on transitional justice, peace building, and the concept of human dignity across social movements, especially victims movements in Latin America, especially in Colombia.

Interviewer: And what is your role here at the university?

Interviewee: I am assistant professor of sociology and I am track coordinator of sociology at UCR.

Interviewer: Um, in your opinion, how would you define decolonization within the context of higher education or in particularly at UCR?

Interviewee: Yeah, well, as we have discussed, decolonization is a fuzzy concept and it has come to mean I think mainly it's the criticism to Eurocentric views, uh, and perspectives of doing knowledge. So it's, uh, trying to revisit, uh, the history and the ways of doing. Creating knowledge, approaching knowledge, approaching the relationship also with the subject, with object, uh, in scientific knowledge. So in that sense, it not only covers social sciences, but also could cover natural sciences, too. Basically, it poses questions about the, uh, The limitations, the creations of the different disciplines.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example where you use it in your academic research or in classes?

Interviewee: In sociology, it's very clear. So, we have this concept of the canon, of the founding fathers of sociology, Marx, Weber, Durkheim. And they have been established as the canon, especially by American sociologists like Talcott Parsons in the 50s. And, uh, there is kind of a myth around them that they dealt with the key questions of modernity, and part of that is true, but part of that is also how this discipline of sociology was created in the context of, uh,

empires and colonial relations. So, um, many of the concepts that we're creating in that moment, uh, especially, were reflecting about an otherization, about the figure of the other, and that other was a colonial subject. And what we see nowadays then is that part of our methodology and some of the concepts that we still use are still stuck in those parameters. So the idea with the decolonization, uh, in the discipline is to, well, to question the canon for, for instance, uh, to try to think, okay, which other authors have been working on, on, on similar issues. How can we use methods that are, for example, participatory, uh, that are less hierarchical, that include different voices, uh, that in a way they could, uh, reduce the impact of that otherization and this, uh, abstract general order that is the colonial subject.

Interviewer: Where did you first encounter this topic of decolonization in your academic journey?

Interviewee: First, first, I think, uh, well, I'm coming from Colombia, so we have had discussions there, uh, not with these terms. Originally, but about, um, participant action research, for example, uh, that we're already trying to blurry these divides about the subject and object of research and about our own role as sociologists that resonate a lot with the current discussions on, on the decolonization. So yeah, we didn't have this word, this term, but it was already this, this discussion, I think it's been before. And with the concept as such, well, I met Walter Mignolo as well in the Latin American Studies Association in Manchester. That was in 2012, maybe? Yeah, so then it was still not, not everybody was super accepting of this perspective, some people considered it was too, still too abstract. And special anthropologists were not super happy with that, but it was interesting to be part of those, to be witnessing those discussions.

Interviewer: In the context of UCR, have you, can you share any experiences or instances where you have encountered discussions or initiatives related to decolonization?

Interviewee: Well, and then going back to the, the fuzziness of the concept, I think nowadays, especially in the last five years, the colonization has moved from these epistemological debates, like what Bob and Teresa Osasanto, the epistemicide, all these kind of things, and being more open to diversity and inclusion as well.

Interviewee: Uh, I think because part of the colonial or the critique to colonialism is this hierarchies and exclusion. So by expanding the criticism to that, then you see the need for having more diversity and inclusion. So regarding to those, uh, initiatives then that have been in use here. Yeah, there are many. There are, uh, before I arrived, there was already this, uh, summer school and this, uh, sociology programs that I read before I prepared my own courses by Rolando Vasquez. Eh, that they were including these questions about the, the, the coloniality, eh, the report by, uh, professor Nancy as well, eh, on these same subjects, eh, going local program. Mm-Hmm. that was including indigenous epistemologies. All these are fine. Super exciting, very interesting approaches. And, and yeah, the students initiatives as well. Uh, the collective, the anti-racism collective. Uh, and diversity and inclusion initiatives that are trying to touch on those subjects.

Interviewer: You also mentioned concepts like diversification and inclusion while explaining decolonization. Do you think these concepts are interrelated or would encapsulate with each other?

Interviewee: Well, it depends how broad I want to go in the answer because if I think about American debates, for example, because this is usually put in the same box in the same discussion with a critical race studies, gender studies, and then the decoloniality comes also as part of this development that of, which come also from sociology, many of them originally. Then, yeah, there is a connection there, uh, in, in familiarity about how these, uh, issues Eh, became to be, but also in the way that they're being attacked. Mm-Hmm. , especially in, in the, in America, in some places. Mm-Hmm. Like in Florida, for example, that, eh, eh, EDI has been removed from, uh, some programs, eh, critical race studies, but now most recently sociology is, is being removed from. being a requirement for graduation. So you can see that the familiarity is not only in how they were created, but also in the attack. Now sociologists are disciplining itself. So I think, uh, that's why there is not, it's no surprise that diversity and inclusion, it is also part of that. But for me personally, sometimes I think that the fussiness can be counterproductive because sometimes when we're talking about decoloniality. Uh, it can mean many things to many people, and those who are suspicious of it, or on one hand, or ones that want to do something of social activism, social justice, they put too many things to that, that is not supposed to do. And then it gets overloaded, and it is these expectations that the community can bring social justice. Well, if you tend to a strict concept, well, it's not, it's really. This curiosity, this transformation of principles of epistemology and all these other things are not necessarily a tool for social justice. Per se. Mm-Hmm. , other things are necessary in order to bring social justice.

Interviewer: Right. And you also mentioned about several student initiatives here at UCR promoting, um, uh, decolonization or whoever case for decolonization. In this context, what do you think is the role of students in decolonization, um, of education institutions also in relation with UCR?

Interviewee: Hmm. Well, I think there are. Several dimensions of the role. One, well, a student is a, is a student. Needs to study, needs to, uh, learn and eh, learn as much as possible. Not only one version of the decoloniality or issues of social justice or diversity and inclusion, but you have to try to look at it from different perspectives. Also, not only. At an academic level, but also from listening from people's experiences, creating spaces where people can talk also about their experiences. That on one hand, there is the dimension as an active participant, an actor in the university as an institution, as a community. So then it is also the creation of spaces, maintenance of replication spaces, framing of certain problems in the lenses of decoloniality, if that is useful, of other frameworks, if they are more useful. Uh, and then there is the social dimension. I think the student movement in Europe have characterized themselves by being able to to frame problems and to bring attention and to be activists about, yeah, transversal issues. So from the environment to gender to now this, uh, historical justice as well. I think that goes beyond than UCR. It's about this connection with other students, for example, in the country or in Europe or from other perspectives, digital activism. All that is possible

Interviewer: . From your perspective as a professor at UCR, do you think that it's crucial to have students engage, um, in advancing the process of decolonization within an academic environment?

Interviewee: What do you mean by crucial?

Interviewer Uh, do you think that they play a crucial role in advancing the process of decolonization?

Interviewee: Hmm. I think if there are, uh, teachers creating curricula, That is, uh, going towards questioning these colonial roots of the disciplines and all that. Yeah, it can, but it cannot be only one way, but that is true for many other processes. I think, uh, we are moving towards having a learning experience that is, which students have a say, they're more participative, they're more open. Uh, and they are also connected with the community, like we have, for example, here, community engaged learning. So, yes, but it's not only because it is the decolonial. I think, in general, the learning process has to have this, uh, an active role for the students, that they assume responsibility of their own learning experience. And in that process, one of the dimension, one of the goals can be, okay, let's try to, to, to explore this decolonial dimension and see where it goes.

Interviewer: Mm hmm. Um, in terms of your personal involvement, have you personally involved in any initiatives or projects that aimed to incorporate decolonial perspective in your teaching or research activities?

Interviewee: Well, eh, in my research activities, well, part of my work is on, eh, Afro Colombian, eh, Yeah, religious and cultural and social, uh, perspectives in dealing with conflict. So it is, uh, participatory approach to transitional justice, also the construction of knowledge. So these are also questions that are the, at this moment, really central in the, in the field as well of transitional justice. So, yeah, I have. Try to look, uh, into that work with the dad, eh, my own research, eh, in the teaching, I try to incorporate those elements. Also some courses, some of them, what I notice is it is difficult to be able to have this in all the levels. I have tried in a introduction to sociology to have this element as well of looking at the colonial roots of the classical sociologies. But at the same time, it is a moment that they need to learn what is the classical sociology, for example, or the main problems with social structure and agency. So, to have, uh, to learn. The critique, but also the thing that is being criticized first. So in modern sociology, then we go more, there is a second year, we go more in depth into that discussion. And then we look at also other authors that are more. We look at the critical approaches to modernity coming from within Europe, like the Frankfurt School, for example. But also from other perspectives, more global south, like. Uh, the Barhambra, uh, book, or, uh, Franz Fanon, and other perspectives as well. I'm sorry, and there is one that is more cru well, more, more, more important is the course on social memory and historical justice. Because in that one, then we work with the Ketikoti Tafo, uh, we it's a local organization working on, yeah, issues of related to the legacy of the slavery and historical justice. We also go to the Zeeuws Archive to see the exhibition and to have contact with them. Eh, with the local community as well. And we go to the Tropen Museum to have a broader

perspective of all the issue of colonial empire. And to see how it's being remembered and how the museum itself is trying to decolonize itself. So that is also an initiative there.

Interviewer: With your, um, incorporation of Decolon Perspective, do you think it is crucial to incorporate these ideas in teaching learning?

Interviewee Can you repeat the question?

Interviewer : Um, since you're, since most of the courses incorporates Decolonial Perspectives, and based on the outcome that you have seen, do you think it's crucial for other courses as well?

Interviewee: my courses. Hm. I don't know, I think it depends How, I think it's good to do it well, like if it is relevant and it is, it makes sense with the rest of the course, than to do it just because it's a requirement and to tick a box. Because if there is a sense of pressure, or there is this agenda that needs to be done, I think maybe it's not the best way to do it. It is better to encourage things that are already happening. So, for example, uh, I, I know about debates here, but also in other places, of people that are suspicious about the term decolonization, but they are using, uh, authors from the Global South, other perspectives, or they're using alternative methods to show them, or they're using, for example, in medicine about how I don't know, the body of women or people of color was not incorporated in the history of medicine and how, like they're doing this, but they don't like the concept of decolonization.

Interviewer: Why do you think that they don't like the use of the word decolonization?

Interviewee: Because of the fuzziness of the concept, because it has this proselytistic feeling to it, attached to it, because it has been co opted by institutions sometimes just to tick a box and show themselves like this. Colonial washing, you see it in museums, you see it in universities, that they say, oh we are doing this, the colonial practices, in museums for example, we are doing all this, but we are not doing prostitution, we are not giving back the sacred objects for this culture, or we are doing this, changing the name of a building, a university, but we are still having our quotas, or we change the curriculum, but we are still Not accepting a minority's position of full professor. So people get tired sometimes of It's like greenwashing with environmental issues but with the coloniality. So I think some people get suspicious because of that. Other people because they see it as an imposition, that it lacks dialogue, that it doesn't see other perspectives, that it Ridiculous, makes ridiculous the conservative views and they might feel excluded as well. A lot of times I've heard the term like being afraid of, you cannot say anything anymore. And it is maybe because of lack of spaces to actually have a productive conversation. Because I think the values, the deep values might be closer than we think, but There is no opportunity for having that conversation.

Interviewer: but in your opinion, uh, do you think that, how can we talk about these issues? What do you think, in your, in your, uh, academic journey, how can we talk about the issues of decolonization in spaces like this?

Interviewee: There are several ways I can think of. I'm not an expert. But, uh, one is Yeah, the power that students have is that it's also the generational aspect, that they're young people and they can have a longer term perspective, but more towards, yeah, towards the future. Eh, without being that afraid to change, but actually being invested in change. I think that energy is useful and it's really good to have, like if you have, especially from. Generating positive emotions, eh, that one had for the, so instead of seeing it as a generational conflict and to see, okay, what older people like us can, can we bring to the table as well in terms of. For example, okay, what have we done in our generation or past generations to bring social change, social justice, uh, that could resonate what is being done now because the negative side sometimes with young, uh, younger generations is the tendency of, uh, forget it. What has been done before. So, instead of that, like, there is, it's being built as continuation, continuation of the struggles for civil rights, for gender rights, for all this, for other things also that maybe they are not that connected with the cultural identity. Like, it's not only about cultural identities, also inequalities, also about migration, rights, like, other things. It's not just the form, but the content. So, yeah, to create dialogue in those, yeah

Interviewer:, you mentioned that, um, um, can you give me an example about how younger generations tend to forget about what has been done in the past?

Interviewee: Uh, well, it's something I see in the digital media, TikTok and things like that. Mm. Yeah. Like when it's being said, that, eh Yeah. Like about terms around eh, gender identity, for example, and how. I'm going to give you a very simple example, a very silly example. Uh, you know RuPaul? Yeah. And all the backlash that he got because he was using, yeah, transphobic terms that we're seeing as, perceived as transphobic terms. And I think it's good that he was called for, and there were changes in, in, in the show and, and then they changed it, but there to, to the aggression of being called transphobic while He's been one of the people that have pushed forward so much the movement as well, and the visibilization of LGBT people. That is a way of denying what people have done, and because they don't quickly adapt to the new gains of the movement, then they're being like thrown away immediately, like they want to be rejected. So that's what I mean, like, we need to know more about the history of the movement. Who has been doing that, like maybe you don't know here, who has been, I don't know, head of a union or working with an environmental movement or something, and then you see them, maybe they say the things not in the right way, and then they're immediately, like, labeled.

Interviewer: Do you think it's also similar in the case of UCR?

Interviewee: It might, I think it's something general that might have, I don't know, could be studied. To see, yeah, I know that many people have been doing very cool stuff, but yeah, we don't know. We don't know that much what they have been doing in terms of, that could help the aims of the decolonization, for example, of having more open, inclusive, uh, groups, uh, so.

Interviewer: But coming back into the topic of decolonization, um, do you think classrooms in particular serve as an important place to foster decolonial perspective?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think it's a privileged space. Like, this is not a conversation that often you can have outside of the classroom because it's not relevant for them. Which is a, uh, Uh, an advantage and a challenge at the same time, and this is why sometimes I'm suspicious myself about the decoloniality thing, because I think it mainly serves the classroom, mainly serves the university, and this type of institutions, the museums, the publications, the publishing houses, this type of spaces, and at the end of the day I don't know how well that resonates or not translates into the concerns of everyday, of people in their everyday life, ordinary people. And then sometimes we have all this thing in the classroom and, yeah, then what happens with, yeah, people from, yeah, marginalized groups. How is that, how, is this a tool actually that will help me to understand better these groups and, um, to provide better explanations that could be useful for. Yeah, for understanding the reality, to create better tools for working through the reality. Sometimes I think maybe it's just an alternative way to get to the same point that is not providing the more change. I think we are in the middle of it, we are not yet

Interviewee: The classroom, it's important for, for that because it's the main, one of the main, uh, spheres in which this discussion is done. Mm hmm.

Interviewer: Mm hmm. And what are the challenges do you face while talking about decolonial issues or perspective in classrooms in particular? Hmm.

Interviewee: Okay, there are Practical things like finding publications that are accessible for bachelor level that deal with issues of decolonialization that are not, yeah, yeah, because for graduate level this type of articles, yeah, you have a lot, but for introductory levels I find it difficult. There are a lot of things also like in Spanish as well, but then this issue of of translation. So that is one thing that is very basic. One, it's important, eh, to cover material that it is, because it's a liberal arts college, eh, so I am the person in charge for the sociology courses, we have two other lecturers that are working on other courses, but I feel like the responsibility of having the basic fundamentals covered and then to have trying a balance between the decolonial debates and basically because In the basics, because the discipline is still is overrepresented by the mainstream debates that are not the decolonial ones. So yeah, I think that's attention, but it's not only because of UCR.

Interviewer: Do you think it's advantageous for students, um, uh, when you incorporate decolonial perspective in your curriculum?

Interviewee: I think there are two things. One, that we get a particular type of student that is very critical, that is, they know why they want to get in this type of liberal arts college. So I think for most of them, or at least the ones that enroll in social sciences, which I don't know how it is with other disciplines, I think has an advantage at a personal level, and it has an advantage also at an academic level to look at also these topics in a way that might be more interesting for them. Uh, and yeah, and also I think we are preparing them for the, yeah, the future to come. I think these debates are becoming more stronger. And then, yeah, they will be equipped to engage in this type of discussions if they go to do their master somewhere else, or if they're to work with local communities, at least they will have a perspective that might be better suited to do work with organizations.

Interviewer: In your three years at UCR, right? No, it's going to be two. Two years, okay. In your two years time here at UCR, have you observed any notable examples where student led initiatives have influenced the process of decolonial efforts here at UCR?

Interviewee: Well, yeah. I can see the ones that you have organized, for example. The Also students, uh, representatives, uh, themselves, when the Diversity and Inclusion Committee was expanded, that there was an effort to reorganize it. I think it is very important that they carried that process, uh, but also, uh, workshops on diversity and inclusion. I haven't been. To all of them having had to a few.

Interviewee: And it's good to see how participatory they are. Like it's not a lecture, but it's kind of a workshop or it's from, from more, from below, eh, and things that I've heard, but I haven't attended. Like the Antiracism Collective as well, eh, the Kitta, uh, when they came here. Also, the knowledge, uh, center that is being. Created, eh, as part of the course that I teach as well, the 300, eh, a group of students was there as well, doing this popup knowledge center about legacy of slavery, eh?

Interviewee: Yeah, so if unless you want to expand the definition to everything that is activism, yeah, there are way more other things. But if you want to look Only this, I think. Yeah.

Interviewer: do you think that there's a connection between what is learned be what, what are being taught in classrooms tend to reflect what students do, uh, in their student initiatives? For instance, uh, you mentioned about your course in 300 level with community engagement learning. Do you think these are, like, a reflective process?

Interviewee: Well, I know that the anti racism collective was also born out of another sociology course before I was here. , eh, but the rest, I cannot say, I don't have a broader view of all the courses how they engage or not. Eh, but it might be so I don't, I don't know. Eh, I have seen, for example, that they bring to my class things that I have learned, eh, in the, eh, in this course with the Standing Rock, the ones that they went. Working with indigenous communities and then they work on those cases in my course. So yeah, there is communication in that sense, but yeah, I couldn't pinpoint exactly.

Interviewer: Do you think in this process of decolonization, the collaboration between students and faculty members are important for fostering decolonial learning?

Interviewee The, the what?

Interviewer The collaboration between students and faculty. Do you think it's important?

Interviewee: Yeah, it is important, but I think it's also important that there are groups, movements that are being pulled by the students themselves without waiting until teachers being on board. But I think, yeah, it can always be better.

Interviewer: Um, do you, from your viewpoint, what role should faculty play in supporting? Or facilitating student initiatives focused on decolonization. Do you think the faculties at UCR would have a role?

Interviewee: Again, I think this should be on one hand organic But on the other hand that doesn't mean that we shouldn't get more training on what that means. Maybe on a voluntary basis But yeah to have some very like discussing what it means to decolonize the curriculum, to what extent it is useful to talk about that in engineering, or how is this connected with community engaged learning, for example. So, yeah, I think this is possible, but without being like a policy, from now on we are going to do this and that. Like, we can encourage people to question. Uh, where they're coming from more definitely, like, what, what, from what perspective they're coming from. I'm not saying, like, literally, but if it's the more logical perspective.

Interviewer: Right. Um, but in your academic discipline, are there any specific conservations or challenges related to decolonization that you think are particularly pertinent? If there are any Any challenges that you face in your academic discipline? Hmm. Hmm. But also at the same time in the context of UCI.

Interviewee: I think the main challenge is to create a balance between the diversity of topics, of interest, of material that we need to cover, of the teaching requirements, learning goals. that we need to cover and the pursuit of decolonization. I think, like, if you would take to, to the furthest claims of decolonizing the curriculum that also is connected with ungrading, for example. So really not to have these regimes of evaluating people's, uh, But we cannot surpass that. So we have this institutional constraint. Do we want to surpass them? Like, I am not even that sure because we also want our students to be competitive and being able to go into all kinds of master programs or work. So, yeah, I guess it is a question in academia in general. And for UCR in particular, I guess, is because we have such an international and diverse population. That, uh, at the same time, they're coming, well, from different types of backgrounds. So to, to have a discourse about decolonization, do we talk about Zeeland, do we talk about Europe, do we talk about the States? How do we make this relevant to the students that are coming here as well?

Interviewer: Right. In your, in your perspective, what would a decolonial curriculum look like for you?

Interviewee: Like a fully decolonial curriculum,

Interviewer:. How do you envision a decolonial curriculum, in the case of sociology at UCR?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think, the way I see it, uh, well, the curriculum or the course outlines, uh, well that's the question, is curriculum only course outlines? What is it more than that? Is it the material and it's how we do it? Or is it the whole connections and relations that we have in the context of the university? I don't know yet, I would look a perfect, like an ideal type of decolonial curriculum. What I can, the best thing I can do is to incorporate the decolonial debates in my own course outline so far.

Interviewer: Would it mean more, um, community engaged learning, contacting with community? Or would it also mean, um, um, for instance, uh, collaboration, cross collaboration with universities or scholars? Do you see that?

Interviewee: Yeah, that could be, like, the more traditional one is what I'm doing. Like, to have these elements in these debates in class. Another thing could be to have the community engaged learning. Working with communities, identifying their own issues that are relevant for them, and to use their own concepts and apparatus to understand it. That would be beneficial for having a more decolonial curriculum as well.

Interviewer: In your perspective, um, do you see any sort of, um, problems that student initiatives face while approaching issues related to decolonization within UCR?

Interviewee: well, I think it's the problem of the presentation of the issues, of understanding, of making Yeah, people to know what it is that this is about without also sounding as contrarian only but making the benefit of having this approach being useful for the whole institution. And then that would maybe make easier or would facilitate that people care. And more people participate in this type of project.

Interviewer: In your perspective, also in context of UCR, but also in your academic journey, how do you envision the future of decolonization efforts? Um, and what are the roles do you see faculty members, but at the same time students, in shaping future?

Interviewee: In the context of UCR and my academic journey, like yeah, because it's one thing is to see in the States what is happening and what is happening in Europe. I think maybe the good thing looking at it from a generational perspective is that the newer generations are going to take more positions of action, of decision making, like in professional associations, for example. That's what I see. I part of the International Sociological Association. Mm-Hmm. . And these are, uh, becoming more, more and more, uh, relevant discussions, more brought to the core, like from the margins to court, uh, in inter, uh, international law as well. You can see that, uh, there is, uh, I, I went to. , eh, last, eh, the Law Society Association Conference as well. And you see that this trial, this, eh, third world, eh, international law, , eh, researchers, eh, they are pro bringing this coach more, more to the center. So I think the future is, uh, indeed the people that are. Uh, becoming, yeah, professionals, uh, have a position of decision making. They start thinking, okay, how we incorporate these decolonial elements to the work that we do as a central concern instead of an afterthought, yeah, as well.

Interviewer: And in the context of UCR?

Interviewee: Well, since we are also living through Our own processes of transformation, yeah, that we'll see, like, what is the new dean, for example, say about these issues, how the new themes that are being presented, how they incorporate issues of diversity and inclusion, the support that we get doing this type of element of work. So, yeah, it is, there is room. So far we haven't been silenced or, but there hasn't been, like, super strong motivation to do it either. Mm

Interviewer: hmm. Um, this is the end of the interview. Before I, um, before I stop the recording, I would like to ask you for some final remarks. I realize that you mentioned that it's okay to use your name, uh, in the interview. But if you would decide, would you like to use a pseudonym? Or if you have any preferred pseudonym, if you would like to.

Interviewee: Well, since it's such a small university, you will know the sociology teacher that is working, but I think it is okay in general.

Appendix 6: Dr. Emma (Pseudo Name) Interview transcript

SEPR Saswot Shankar Shrestha

Duration:26:10

21st Feburary 2024

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

I would like to begin in terms of stating the purpose of the research, which is to gain insights from the faculty members at University College Roosevelt to understand the importance or what does the Decolonial processes happen in higher education, but also to gain insight from your perspective as a professor here, and engineering department and how we incorporate these ideas. But first, could you like briefly give me an overview of your position? And your academic background here at University? at UCR?

Interviewee
(Consent)

Saswot Shankar Shrestha
and a year at UCR, or what courses?

Interviewee
(Consent)

Saswot Shankar Shrestha
That's true.

Interviewee
I(..) In an exam, he will not give us the equation he will use Clausius Moretti have to who is this? And then I had to kind of with the context and get the formula. So I try to avoid dropping names. But yeah, so of the names. But I noticed that the names that I do drop, one of them is Wolfgang Paoli, for example. And they do that because he's also Austrian. And he's also a great physicist. Well, he was.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha
But when did you first encountered this topic in your, in your academic journey?

Interviewee
Oh, yeah. So if you are in and say science or engineering, what you the first ever say, my first reaction that was or even call this better, too? Because it's not that doesn't concern us really? Because we have very objective. Yeah. But but it does.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha
Kind of, but do you? Like if you can you share any instances where you encounter any sort of discussions or initiatives at university here or when you're engaging in your projects? Or if this has been a point of discussion in your academic circle?

Interviewee

Not not really to be completely honest.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

But do you think it is important to have these kinds of discussions in STEM or engineering in particular?

Interviewee

I think it is important to be aware. And also because what you need is your and you need examples as well. It is the same thing. If you want to interest or to get rid of this prejudice, that STEM is nothing for women or something special. If you have that. You can tell that but if you don't have any examples of people, you can point them, then it's I don't think it's very effective. And I guess it's the same. If you can tell me people, well, yes, famous scientists from, from your country or from from your part of the world that then gives confidence,

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

right? You explain about like, women and also like inclusivity in STEM. But in your perspective? How will how would you define decolonization? Would it mean like, Aincluding everybody in STEM? Or would it? What would it mean for you? In engineering or in general?

Interviewee

For me, it would mean that I'm, that I can also directly give examples passed from an engine for scientists who were not within the Western culture.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

And have you tried to incorporate this in your curriculum here at UCR? Or?

Interviewee

Not? Not really? Not

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

really. But do you think that that would add an additional value for students or also for your teaching learning experience?

Interviewee

It might. But it's also a matter where I would need to spend time to really look into it. And time is a commodity that is, and

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

I have to admit, like, not all scholars from Asia are like the best or there's always

Interviewee

I think of good or bad, or it's just sort of existence, really, because we tend to just think of it don't know, if it just fall with the names of various equations that was not even sure it was the right causes Musetti Have. But the Italian Walter Manaphy, what the normally, so these are all European names. Right?

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

But have you. But I just wanted to ask you, if you think that there's an important role of students the process of decolonization, where students play an active role, in some ways?

Interviewee

Yes, because as I mentioned, I wouldn't have been wouldn't have even have been really aware of it without basically a student initiative here.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

Could you give me some shared initiatives that you've seen at UCR that talks about these events? Or?

Interviewee

No, I basically saw the effect. Basically, the effect of the student initiative was that, basically, the faculty and staff also started to talk about it. And in my case, we actually become aware of it. I just never, I never considered it,

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

Would you consider in the future, like when you I mean, time is commodity, but when you find time, and it's,

Interviewee

so I am on the lookout, so not accurately, but if I come, if I do come across the name, I will, I will try to remember it. And if it fits in,

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

I actually went through some articles to be prepared and how engineering in particular is seen as a symbol of the progress of civilization. I mean, it also depends calculus and everything. It's like building bridges to train and everything. And these concepts were argued to be more European for development, you know, in some ways, quote and quote, like some can disagree. Why would your perspective be does, like engineering being very Eurocentric would apply to everywhere?

Interviewee

if you're talking about feats of engineering, for me, the permits are not European, a big feat of engineering. You have the Great Wall of China, a big feat of engineering. So it's more a case of timing, I think, because a lot of the progress that happened in engineering was is connected to the Industrial Revolution. There was a very European centric and even if there would have been kind of non European influences. I don't think that it would have been recorded. And Robeson Cruz on his Friday. Yeah.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

And also one of the arguments I read on the article was like, everything is focused on the British way of doing Industrial Revolution. What about other people's way of doing it? I wanted to ask you, you mentioned like, how STEM is objective, but then there's also a question mark next it, but why do you think there's a question

Interviewee

Because you always have bias. If you look at how, how to do things, it's also stem or engineering, in particular Mechanical Engineering tends to forget about the side effects. So you kind of it's doable? Is it the question is always is doable? But never should we do it? Or very rarely should we do it. Just

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

Also just out of curiosity? How is it that bias influenced because as a non-stem person, like you're dealing with equations, numbers, how can bias come into this? I

Interviewee

I mean, you, you deal with data, but then the interpretation of data and STEM is also statistics on lots of statistics, statistics, your analysis of the questions that you ask will introduce bias. That's the same in science than it is in social science or arts and humanities.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

And do you think this bias is mostly predominantly Western centric? Or do you think it's like, it's everybody? Oh, that's everybody. That's everybody?

Interviewee

Yeah, everybody has a bias. So you have to be very aware of it. Well, at least try to avoid it. And you will see this, I mean, if you count data science, for example, and also AI, with bias, there were several things. Are there several examples that the, the, yeah, the bias of the of the people who set it up, the bias of the data that you will use to train the AI has huge influence.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

You mentioned like one of the challenges that you've not challenged in particular, but you mentioned one of the problem, which is time as a commodity. And but what other challenges or considerations do you think is, is there when you want to include decolonial curriculum or ideas from other parts of the world? What challenges do you think you tend to face? It could be institutional or

Interviewee

From me would be how to find it. And then you also have communication problems. Yes, English is kind of was a universal language, but especially if you're going into local initiatives. Yeah, I can't even read letters or recognize, I didn't speak that many languages.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

But but in terms of the students, faculty collaboration, you mentioned a little bit about, it's important, because of students, faculty has become aware. But how do you view this collaboration and fostering the sort of environments?

Interviewee

I'm not sure I understand.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

You mentioned that, you know, because of student initiatives, the faculties are also get informed. How do you view this collaboration? Do you think it's important to have this sort of interaction going on between students and faculty?

Interviewee

Yes. I am. I'm 56 years old. I am settled in my ways. And I mean, maybe not as settled as others, but still, when you're and I always say when you're 18, you want to change the world, and when else so to really get kind of student initiative for me, it's really kind of a nudge I pushed to kind of make me step out of my very settled path and look at things in new and it's something that I that I based in.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

Has this happened in your courses or classes where students ask you, why are we doing this? Why not other things? Has there been any instances where some students have question? I'm trying to think of a specific one.

Interviewee

I mean, yes, but not necessarily with regards to decolonization. It was basically what, uh, what I value most is when students really kind of ask questions at one particular student who will not stop asking questions, and it was really, absolutely certain that he understood it, and actually helped me a lot as well, because I thought I've explained it quite well. And then was it? Okay. I need to look into that. Again. So, but that's not what really kind of point of view. Actually, it was, it was something you said, I just realized that and that was the council meeting where it was present. And you were Chairing. And it was basically the absolute, normal way in which you introduce the pronouns, that's also something that is very new for me. I will say, when I when I did introduce myself, when she/ her to the class, I kind of stumbled over it. That is still something that is that is new for me. So yeah. So that it is yeah, it kind of. But yeah, it stayed in my memory because that's, that's basically where we should go. Yeah,

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

definitely. Also, also the closing question, but also good insight, how would you envision this? Or like, how would you envision or decolonize curricula in in STEM or in your department, would that mean, more women more inclusivity?

Interviewee

So, but what brings to mind is actually a picture that I got from, from a friend, which is two women, one of them from so basically, from behind one of them naked, and the other wearing hijab. And they're walking side by side. And it doesn't matter. I think that this should also be the aim for decolonization. Basically, we have, I don't know, maybe something like a picture of all different kinds of all different or different researchers from all parts of the world, kind of make that the normal. A few. Don't think of it, we had I did this, we did these experiments, when I was in high school in psychology. They showed us 14 pictures of people with white lab coats, and then asked us to associate professions with them. And it's expected that it's especially bad when you really speak German, because of the articles and the way the professions are named. But it was basically we realized that the men with the whitecoats were the doctors and engineers and scientists and the women were nurses. And in the end, it was picture 14 pictures of Nobel Laureates. And that again, this is something that really stuck with me. And this is the bias. So if you think scientist in your head, what pops up is white men. And this is basically what you need to work on that this automatic reaction. You say, Doctor, that this changes that this also did basically diversify or regain your head

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

But also a follow up question like overtime in your academic career that you've had. Do you think this has slowly changed over time? Or it still is very predominantly white men field in STEM?

Interviewee

It is changing, but it's really slow. So we're not talking about years. We're talking about decades.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

I mean, you are contributing it to being one of the women in STEM, and then

Interviewee

but it was again like so Heriot Watt is about other big university. And I remember talking to one of my female students, and I was so happy when I finally I finally got a female professor in third year. And I was the only one.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

but also to gain insight, but why is it that it's the field is so predominantly men? Or is it that it just I'm trying to generalize, but why is it that there is less attraction from women or other queer or other communities?

Interviewee

Again, it got better definitely. But when I started I need It the stubbornness of a whole herd of mules to stay with it. So you do get you need to be. It's, again, not that they're better, but you need to have a very conscious decision for it. It's not like, Oh, you very rarely have the kind of Oh, my, my dad was an engineer. I'm doing engineering as well. Um, I've always wanted to be an electrician, but I'm also quite smart. So let's do electrical engineering. So you have been, but I would also notice is that you have now also generations, and my mom is an engineer. So I'm doing engineering as well. So there, there is a change, but you still have a lot of factors as starts in kindergarten, where there's something and friends that So how often is little girl complimented you, this is a really nice dress you're wearing? How often is that two little boys, this is really nice trousers you're wearing. And it really starts from there. And then you have gender roles in comics and in children's programs. And you still have to mean yes, there is now kind of a counter movement as well. But you still hear so many people telling you that women are better in social science in real nurturing men and men to be hard, you can't cry. And that's rubbish. So, and again, there's a lot where you need to need very still to have connected people. And this is kind of what feminism is for me, well, you can do what you want. But what you can do best and don't need to fulfill societal roles.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

In what sort of challenges did you face in this time, also being women in STEM, and when you have to work with your colleagues, it's predominantly men.

Interviewee

That was no problem. So I heard from other students, and there was one professor, where you basically could get a better grade, if you were, if you wear miniskirt or something like that, but never happened to me. Also, I would never do that. So basically, with my colleagues, I never

really encountered not even like really any cases of misogyny. So in maybe I was just lucky. Maybe it's just that it was oblivious. I don't know, but I never I never felt it was more outside things. So one of the, the thing, so this is, so our parents are friends. And we worked a summer job together. And he asked me and it was not mean it was not kind of with any genuinely curious. It's kind of good. And so now you're studying physics in effect five years, and then you have your title. And then you get married and have kids and so for nothing. It was not it was chilly and curious kind, but that's not it. But these are kind of so the standard thing. So are you studying physics? Okay, and usually makes you. Yeah. And what else? And one. Also, because I worked a lot during my undergrad as well. And it was someone I just randomly talk to, and as a bit of studying physics, I would never allow my daughter to do that. I was like....

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

But do you do you think that having diverse identities or gender in STEM would promote more inclusivity or more diversification in this field? Or do you think this field is already diverse enough?

Interviewee

No it is not. Because you still have if you look at the people stacking, so UCR is unusual because we have Yeah, on average, I would say 50% women in our engineering classes. I think this semester is the first engineering class where I have more male than female students in there. And yeah, so in Heriot Watt, it was like it was still more or less that 15% said, and no matter how much we were finished, it's 15%. What I did like you there was what was the at least I don't know. I've been gone for five years, but I had several trans colleagues for example. So and nobody better than I did.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

Yeah. But do you think it's important to have this diversity and,

Interviewee

Yes I think not necessarily at University, but in general. Because, you know, if it's not possible, at a university, where else where else would it be? Definitely.

Saswot Shankar Shrestha

I think that is the last question. Thank you very much, Professor for

Appendix 7: Dr. Tobias Van Gent Interview Transcript

SEPR Saswot Shankar Shrestha

Duration: 30:58

22nd February 2024

Interviewer 0:00

I'm so I'll be starting the interview. I think I'll just keep it here, I think that should be able to capture the audio. The purpose of the research is to gain insights from the faculty members from UCR. And specifically to understand the importance of decolonial processes in the Netherlands, but also at us here in particular, but also to get your insight into your work. But just to begin with, could you briefly give me an overview of your academic background, and your current role at the university?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 0:29

Oh, so I have talk about my whole academic career?

Interviewer 0:32

not entire...

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 0:35

So I am a historian used to work at the Naval Academy. Besides teaching history, I teach political science, political philosophy, mainly my field specialties, military history, and at UCR, I work since 2007, at UCR, when it was the Roosevelt Academy. I teach courses like early modern history, modern history, the history of empires, Western World War and indeed, political philosophy. My main field of research is in the military history, but also mainly local history.

Interviewer 1:08

Just to dive in into the main questions, how would you define decolonization within the context of Higher Education?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 1:14

That's intriguing, because I actually have, so I find the term problematic, and but the way that I translated is that I think that as in history, as an historian, also, as a professor, you should have a clear eye in on all the different perspectives of historical events and different experiences. And in that sense, I find it quite a positive thing, because it's always been, and you also asked a certain question, you know, at UCR? Well, the advantage that you share, we have so many different students with so many different backgrounds, so you get a very different perspective on historical events, which is, I think, worthwhile for everyone. The problem I have with the term decolonization is that I find it a little bit like framing, we see the same now for instance, with terms like racism, genocide, there's an inflation of those terms, and if you look precisely what it means. So I understand in the context of different perspective, why the term decolonization is used, but I think it's a kind of framing because you immediately denounce anyone else that wouldn't agree with this. If so, you support colonization. decolonization is the kind of term you know, nobody's against decolonization, everybody would support it. And I am afraid that using these kinds of terms leads to polarization. And polarization doesn't help you know, it, you should

have a nuanced, open debate. And you're not going to convince people I use this kind of terms, because it could lead to the to the accusation. You don't see my perspective. So you're in favour of colonialism with you know, that will, it will kill any form or you're not creating any acceptance for other visions opinions perspective, if you're using terms like this? So this is my personal perspective.

Interviewer 3:03

but how would you define it based on like thinking about how it's can be polarizing, but how would you define it or conceptualize it?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 3:13

And, again, what does what I said is that I think it's very important in teaching, but also in conducting historical research, that you will have an open eye to all different perspective, all the participants, and I get that the term decolonization is used, because the general idea is, is that a lot of the way the history presented very much from a Eurocentric or western perspective, and in which other perspectives, history is written, better written by the winner, this one is victorious. So that is what I get. It could be. This is why it's connected to Decolonisation.

Interviewer 3:52

Could you share any instances or a period of time where you encountered this discussions in your academic journey, or also in at UCR?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 3:59

Well, we teach modern history because the object of colonization process is there. I just had a discussion about in class this morning about the impact of imperialism. And we ended up for instance, about the boxes uprising, which clearly has two perspectives. One perspective of the international countries that joined forces to liberate their diplomats and the embassies that were under siege. While the Chinese perspective the people that were indeed revolting, said we you know, we are very frustrated by his enormous dominance of the West economic dominance, but also cultural dominance. So he wants to get rid of foreigners, and both sides, you should be aware of both sides to really understand what was going on. So that's only one aspect but of course, you dive into even more perspective on the day he was the official Chinese government who didn't know what to do to support the revolt or support the international community. So now in that case, and to have a better, better view, better understanding of history, all those different perspectives are important.

Interviewer 5:05

But why is it that you think it's important to be aware about these discussions?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 5:09

then you can get much better understanding of history. And history is never one sided. They're always mutable perspectives. Well, I'll give you another example. I'm now doing research on the Second World War. And if you, for instance, look at movies on the second world war or many books as well, it's very much focused on the perspective of the Allied liberators. Now, in our books, we constantly say, Okay, we have the allies, but we also have the German sights. And you should give that at least equal attention. But as a third sight, that's always overlooked as well, that was the civilians who were more or less in this conflict in between allied forces and German

forces. So those three perspectives are just as important to write about to talk about your lecture about

Interviewer 5:54

Why do you think is that some perspectives are some voices, like from the German side or from other sides are not being heard, or are not being researched into?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 6:03

Well, the one of the most biggest problems is not an unwillingness, but simply the lack of sources, which is very essential in history. And this is also, even if you look back at, for instance, you go back further in history, we have a lot of knowledge of the elite, because they left a lot of sources. They could write and ordinary people couldn't. So we constantly see in history that certain voices are simply not as loud, it's up by the loudness of voices, there's one of the maybe so I don't mean to think you know, that it's a conspiracy, because there's, it's sometimes even tense in that direction, or you want to talk about this. It's also the lack of sources, but sometimes also, of course, a lack of perspective, then people are not aware that there's always another side to the story. And there's always a different group involve, which you actually have to search for, and find, and I think it's obligation for each historian. And this is actually the kind of obligation you have scientifically as a scholar, that you should indeed try to show as many different sides of story as possible.

Interviewer 7:08

But how is it that in your research as well, that we hear these voices, regardless of lack of resources? How can we know?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 7:16

Well, that's always the duty as a historian, you have to find those sources. It seems like going back in history, they're way less sources, and then you have to try to find as many as possible, but also, and this is another perspective, I used to compare history with a private investigator, you have to even with some scarce information you're trying to make up, okay, what could it be? So you have to go, you have to speculate, which is, of course, difficult. But, you know, you can't really say, Okay, I've no sources, I know that there were other people around, but just not don't, don't, let's not talk about that. So I think you have to use your creativity as a scholar, both in terms of trying to find sources, but also to fill in these gaps, which appear due to lack of sources.

Interviewer 8:04

But in your research, or in projects that you've been doing, have you tried to incorporate these, quote unquote, decolonial processes, or trying to look into other perspectives?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 8:15

I think it's your obligation, so I tried to do that as much as possible. But of course, you know, it's, there will be many occasions that is due to unawareness, maybe the lack of time, or the lack of perspective, that and then as a result it is good to have others points, but then again, in a minute, well, I better say to people, oh, but have you checked this or have you? Then people say, Oh, we should decolonize you which is a whole different way of approaching people.

Interviewer 8:46

But why is it that you feel it's like an obligation to do so?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 8:50

Because it's an obligation for you as a scholar, or as a professor, and the department is as well, it makes history also much more complex. So sometimes you feel as a professor, you want to make things easy, it's easy to understand, but it makes things more complex, but in the end, the reality is also much more complex than we think.

Interviewer 9:12

Could you give me an example of a course where you try to incorporate like multiple perspectives? Or Decolonial Perspectives?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 9:17

Oh, many, especially human history event by a class when I was talking about the Aztecs, the most of the things we know about the Aztecs, we know from the Spanish and many sources of the essay because they didn't even have written scripture. And I pointed out to the students this problem and also mentioned the books that at least try to, to fill this gap and, and of course, history is always biased, but also create this awareness that what we read about them and same as apply Fraser to the Persian Empire, which is much older, we know most of them about the Greek. So the awareness that what we know the sources we have, are written from a certain perspective have a bias as well, because they were the enemies of the Persians or they were the enemies of the Aztecs.

Interviewer 10:04

But in in classrooms in particular, do you think it serves an important place to foster these kinds of perspectives?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 10:12

Yeah, of course, because you get a better understanding. And the goal of a professor is to create a better understand, again, that things are never one sided. And it's never a simple thing. And they're also multiple perspective and multiple efficiencies. That's, that's, that's very important.

Interviewer 10:29

Do you also think students voices, our students initiatives, play an important role in challenging, not particularly challenging, but also giving you a different perspective?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 10:38

Of course, to adding to the story, which indeed, and I try also, to create his freedom, that is to say, Okay, I want to write my paper on this or in class debates, you know, if you forget about this, so that is something that, you know. In the ends, I am not the one that creates a course it's a dual creative process, which together with the students, and I do recall, for instance, that in my class, you talked about the, it was about European migration, but I want to talk about the Asian as well, which was also for me quite an eye opener.

Interviewer 11:16

But in academic discipline, in particular, when you are trying to consider different voices, but also in classrooms, what sort of challenges do you encounter?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 11:25

The challenges, indeed, the lack of sources, that is really the biggest problem. And, again, it's not a kind of the lack of sources. But you can, if you look at the whole field of science, you of course, you see dominance. Sciences are produced by academics; sciences are produced by universities. Now the majority of academic universities are indeed located in the western world. So it's not a win, not a coincidence that they're mainly producing about their worlds. And of course, they are challenged. And I do also see a lot of scholars who actually dive into other countries, other cultures with another own, but they also do it because there's a lack of people with a clear voice from those other civilizations, cultures, and so on. One of the other examples I was using at History of Empires, when I talked about the Spanish Empire, it's quite intriguing that the best books on Spanish empire are written by English and American scholars, not by Spanish. And to a certain extent with on the other hand, and this is what I find important as well. I think that as a true historian, of course, every historian is biased, and every historian is trapped in his *Zeitgeist*; in the spirit of the age. But as a historian, you should have the ability to talk about or try to place yourself in the in the footsteps of people that have a completely different background. Because that is, as historically you should do. So you know, if the story would be, you cannot write or lecture about something that you are not part of, then it would be the end of this study of history. I read a lot about the Second World War, but I've never been in the Second World War. So sometimes I have a tendency, if I listen to all the debates that are coming up, we had, for instance, there was a Dutch author asked to translate a poem of an Afro American, beautiful poem. And that means that he was accused, and you can translate it because you're, you're white, so you don't. And that's for me as a historian, quite problematic, because if we, if we if we enlarge this idea to us all, then nobody can write about history more, unless you were part of that history. Well, that means that everything that happened more than a century ago, is that out of reach or out of place. So, I do think, although it's difficult to understand that as well from cultural background and that you always do try to also to try to understand the other side's perspective and the other side's perspectives.

Interviewer 14:01

IN your research processes and also to see how do you try to overcome these challenges?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 14:05

Well, one of the things I do is to read primary sources, for instance, things like diaries letters, because it connects you really closely to an individual who lived through a certain time or to a certain historical event. And then it also enables me to show it because it comes up psychology becomes more emotional. And that enables me also to really try to grasp what was going on, or what the person actually was enduring.

Interviewer 14:39

You mentioned about the importance of students. Has there been any instances where you've encountered student initiatives in particular, it is your way of fostering these sorts of multiple perspective or decolonial processes at UCR?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 14:53

In class I have seen this but not on other occasions, but mainly in class and now try to create an atmosphere that is safe, open secure that they have they get the floor, and they have. But there also have been occasions in which there's also another tendency which a little bit connected with this, I once had an intriguing discussion in which I showed an article, I didn't even ask them to read it. But I showed this article, there was actually a professor. So he had a certain background,

it was not yet a professor at relatively good university. But he actually wrote an article saying, *"For many countries at least a couple of countries it is better that they would be decolonized."* Very intrigued. And I, I was not as interested in his arguments, because I didn't feel that they were very convincing. But I will always inspire students, you know, if you're intrigued it, read it and not to be convinced, but also to find counter arguments. So why is this? But then we had a debate that was a student from Africa, who said, you know, we can talk about colonization, it's so sensitive. So, we should avoid speaking about this at all. This, I found really, really tricky. And I'll tell you why. Because the problem is that people on the other side, and well, I presume they are the other side, for instance, the right wing because they are now using the same form of arguments about sensitivity. So they are saying in America, now, we don't talk about slavery anymore. Because it's so harmful to our students. We don't talk about sexuality anymore. It's so I think one of the dangers of this, I think it's very good to talk about different perspective, but one of the dangers to say, Okay, I don't want to listen to that perspective, because it's from a certain angle, and it's much too dominant and unwanted, it also creates a certain fear that things will be canceled, and that will change because the other side is using the same kind of tactics now.

Interviewer 17:01

You mentioned about our classrooms needs to be safe and secure to have these sorts of discussions. Why is it that you think so?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 17:06

Because otherwise, students don't feel free and they don't feel safe and and at sometimes it is problematic, because I had sometimes students who say, you know, I wish I could say something, but I'm a little bit afraid how others will respond. And there was even a student who once said to me, I was encountered outside class by people who are not even inside class about certain opinions that I've raised. But I always say we have a kind of arena. And you can challenge your opinion, if you don't, just like John Stuart Mill said, if you if you don't have a freedom of speech, people won't speak out. But people will be challenged to have different perspective or to rechange their opinions. So in the end, it's always beneficial for everyone. And it's not to convert people. But it's also to sharpen your own ideas. And this is also one of the reasons why, for instance, political philosophy, if many people have very "left" ideas, I will throw in at a certain moment, some right wing ideas simply to counter, it will also do it the other way around. So, people are very conservative with this, I've also tried to be on point out the perspective of socialism or whatsoever, simply to challenge them and to balance out that they also are aware of different opinions or different perspective.

Interviewer 18:29

How is it that we can create balances in instances where you mentioned that, you know, decolonization is something like you need to include everybody, but at the same time, there's also fear of cancel culture. But then it's also not about throwing away all the quote, unquote, like old white men in philosophy or whatever. But how is it that we can strike a balance so that we understand history with the perspective but also have understanding from the other side,

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 18:53

To give room to other perspective, but to give room doesn't mean that you have to skip the perspectives that are already there. And there's not a danger, which I see, especially when, especially when you try to label things, okay, these are this is western or white male perspective, the danger is that you leave it at it in this situation, where you are coming close to this whole

identity policy discussion, so we don't have to listen anymore because it's the western or, white male. The problem with this is that we already see, for instance, and authoritarian regimes. They are denouncing certain ideas, for instance, about rule of law about political system saying, Oh, no, but that's Western. So we can it's not ours we can. And I think that's also quite dangerous, because it's a big debate, but it's the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It's a western concept or is it a universal concept? And then I show my students in class look: who wrote this piece, and we see people from China we see people from India and students said, Oh, but that's not enough. He's actually something like Western. But if you actually create this atmosphere that you can actually ignore certain opinions by saying, Oh, no, but that's an opinion of a white male, or that's gonna be of a Christian or that's an opinion of a of a Muslim or dissident opinion of the Western world. You also get the opportunity to certain areas we actually see now in, in even countries like China, you know, this whole idea about democracy, you know, that's Western, we can ignore it. And, well, democracy is also about the safeguarding of majorities. It's about safeguarding the rights of the individual. And then you give a kind of justification for China to do what they do to the Ughurs. And what do they do to the people in Tibet, and say, well, we don't have to regard them because all those voices are Western. So you should always be careful also to labeling perspectives, and therefore, you know, we can ignore it, because it's for a certain perspective. Therefore, I think there should be room for every perspective.

Interviewer 21:08

And just also going back into students, but do you think that there's, there needs to be a collaboration between students, and also professors in order to foster or have these discussion.

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 21:18

There's always a collaboration and choosing professors. However, there's also a tendency that people have to be careful to say it quite well. In a public debate, let's put it that way. If I see how people use history, it's also in a lot of cases based on the lack of knowledge. So, I'm not going to say that I'm wiser, because I've studied history more. But you should also be careful, I think, to say, you know, I just imagine history and actually run in a public debate that history is being misused. And it's also lack of knowledge. So, of course, I think students, especially you know, history is such a large field, we have many people that are very specialized, even at a young age. And it is always very good to collaborate. I learned a lot for my students, but you know, a certain background and it should it start with the acknowledgement of facts before you can have a profound and a strong opinion, and also having the right form was arguments.

Interviewer 22:24

Right, but how can you explain the how is history being misused within a example

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 22:31

Look What's happening in Gaza. This conflict cannot be understand without knowledge of history. And see both sides, you know, the the Muslim will claim, yeah Jerusalem is the Holy city. But the Israelis have a book that claims the same. And the Muslims say, well, we lived there, and then the Jewish came, but usually, yeah, but we lived there before that we were expelled. So history constantly plays a role. And then people have a tendency to offer the kind of history which is in their advantage. Look, for instance, if Ukraine and Russia. Is Crimea part of Ukraine, well, it was but only since 1954. So when Russian say yeah, but before that it was actually Russian. And I don't say that, that you can dynamically have a legal or moral judgments. But you should

be aware, that is not that simple. The Russian claim isn't simple. But you could also say the Ukrainian claim isn't that simple.

Interviewer

So there is no straightforward answer in history.

Dr. Tobias Van Gent

No, and but of course, it's not an answer, which is reassuring, but I'm constantly trying to pinpoint history is complex. And if you for instance, we talk about colonization, now, you look probably at the Netherlands as being one of the imperialist powers. And the Dutch have a long colonial history. But the Dutch on their behalf were also part of a different empires. We were part of the Roman Empire. We were part of the Spanish Empire, we were part of the movement and Empire we were part of the we even part of the. So even from the perspective of that history it's not a one way imperialists, history now, we have also been the victims. But if you then look in history, if you visit look at our institutions, if you look at our law, then the answer is that, for instance, our legal system is very much based on the French. The French, introduced during the time they ruled out the Netherlands for 20 years. Our legal system, if you look at our political institutions, those were introduced by the blue guns and the Spanish when we were also occupied then even the German occupation which you will hardly find any Dutch person say, Yeah, we won't. Even some legal things like progressive taxation. Also certain health insurances were introduced by German so my again want to try to teach in history of empires, of course, we have a certain perspective. And if you think about freedom, you don't want to be exploited. You want to be free, you want to be independent. But even from the history of empires, we can see the things were introduced, which were now at least at least embraced to people that was so dead again, that is still not if you look at the legacy of imperialism, it is not a black and white history.

Interviewer 25:15

You mentioned about the Netherlands and I didn't. I'm pretty sure you know about Maagdenhuis It was an occupation by students who are also members with faculty.

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 25:27

Yes! They wanted to enforce democratization of universities.

Interviewer 25:31

And there was this one quote about democracy, there is no democratization without decolonization. And that was one of the slogans that that was put up,

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 25:38

But there was also on in 1968, I think,

Interviewer

yeah, that was way before and that was in 68. It was bigger.

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 25:38

because there was a later on also, I think, a couple of the 20 years ago. Okay. Yeah.

Interviewer 25:52

Do you do think this occupation had an impact on other Dutch universities to democratize but also, to decolonize

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 25:59

Do you know what the problem, Saswot, was that everywhere? You know, a lot of the people were actually aware that the system was very hierarchal. And it was an old fashioned. And it was implemented then that student had a much bigger saying, so the democartisation process was important. However, after a couple of decades, very intriguing, many students lost their interest. And the we still have the Council here as well, and the PC committee, but we actually see today that a lot of students are, don't get anywhere. So it's kind of strange. That is right. And this rate of participation that was fought for that in a lot of universities that it was actually slipping away to?

Interviewer 26:44

What do you think that this energy is slipping away from students?

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 26:49

It has to do with the with the zeitgeist with the spirit of the age, you know, in the 60s, when you had all this right, also in France, and people were revolting against Vietnam, they were revolting about the older generation, so they really want to break free, in many aspects also in in terms of sexuality, and so on, you know, much more free sex and much more of acceptance for homosexuality. So that was going on. So it was very much at the spirit of the age. And apparently since then, and maybe some say, historians say it also has to do with economics. And you know, when economics going bad, people are much more interested, okay, I have to find a good job, I have to study hard, and weigh less in this whole idea that you should improve the world or you should change the world. So it really also depends on the spirit of the age.

Interviewer 27:34

Right? This reminds me of, I think, one of your lectures about Marxism. And then I think it was you mentioned about, if there is a revolution, then the first target becomes the professors or something like that.

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 27:47

Especially my Oh, wait with Mao Yeah. Let's go to a proletarian revolution. Yeah,

Interviewer 27:52

yeah. But just to as like a closing questions on your thoughts about how do you envision a decolonize curriculum or a curriculum that includes multiple perspective? How do you envision this in the future, but also, now

Dr. Tobias Van Gent 28:07

I think, I can only speak about my discipline, what I do see, there's a growing awareness, therefore, a growing attention for the different perspectives. And you've already can see, a lot of authors are now producing books, showing the other side of it. And that's the best thing you can have. Because then you really have also a solid academic base, to incorporate that in your, in your lectures, if ever see the amount of books, just today I showed in my class, this book. Now, this is

a much more different perspective. And it was written in. I think, 2022. So, I keep track on everything that has been published, because I surely cannot do everything on my own. And once you know, this is for me, also solid back, you know, I read this book, that very good insight, but it's also you know, it has a solid academic background, and I incorporate that in my classes. And then you have, well, it's it's very hard to, to establishm, when is it really balanced? It's very hard to do. But at least it's the sort of growing awareness but also the growing attention that is now being given to, to historians. For the other side of the coin, it's put it in that way, that is really helping out a lot. And it could also help out in future that this, this whole academic world is also established much stronger in those countries that have been unheard into so far. Because, again, it's an uneven battle in the sense that all the big academies, all the big all the research money is all available now in the Western world, which is also good as a benchmark to see of course now China Attention is much more attention. Research is now going on budget, but there are many more countries that also need such an academic boost.

Appendix 8: Dr. Rita Ray (Pesudo Name) Interview Transcript

SEPR Saswot Shankar Shrestha

Duration: 25:51

5th March 2024

Interviewer: So the purpose of this research or is to gain insight from faculty members at UCR to understand the importance of decolonial process in higher education also within UCR and in the Netherlands. Uh, but I could, I wanted to start off with, um, if you could briefly give me an overview of your academic background and your current role at the, at the university here.

Interviewee: (Consent)

Interviewer: yeah, okay. Um, just to dive into the main topic, how would you define decolonization within the context of higher education, but also the way how you've encountered this topic?

Interviewee: Yes. So for the second part of your question, um, I, I really have to look into this.

I'm glad I did because it's, um, As you can tell, it's not really a topic that is related to my field. So how, what I found about it, uh, just doing a Google searches and also about the latest like, um, publications and, um, media attention about it is to sort of go away from the colonization, um, focus of like our successes as, um, in our cultural background.

And sort of make it more broader, like the inter the information that students get in education is not focused on, um, what we managed to achieve with colonization. That's sort [00:02:00] of what I got from it. So more of a broader view and, um, also being honest about the past of what colonization did to, um, peoples and um, and, and just the culture in general.

Right. That's sort of what I got from it, but please correct me if I'm wrong. No, it's, it's, that's, that's exactly what it means,

Interviewer: but um, what does it mean for you? That's the contextual definition you found it, but in your personal, when you, when you observe the information, what does it mean for you?

Yeah, I think

Interviewee: it's, it, it is like, it, this has been a debate, uh, especially here as well with Michiel de Ruyter in Vlissingen, they wanted to take away a statue, they wanted to take away like the, the names of certain streets and um, Sort of take away their heroic status like they of course on the one hand and I'm sort of torn in between the two so on the one hand this has given us a lot of like freedom and um Maybe even made our country survive in that respect But on the other

hand, I do think we have to be honest about The suffering and the the wrongs that have been done and I do fully agree that we Need to be more objective [00:03:00] about it.

So less um

Patriotic. I think patriotism is in the last, let's say a hundred years, we were very proud of what we achieved over sort of the suffering of others. And I think now we're becoming more aware of how that suffering actually was a bad thing and that we shouldn't have, um, done or we. That's also with the, the excuses for slavery, like we didn't do it.

It was like people before us that were in charge and could make these decisions. Yeah. But I do think it's important that we become aware of it to make sure it doesn't happen again. Um, and to just give the full picture instead of just colored towards like heroic activities.

Interviewer: You mentioned that, um, like topics of decolonization may not be related to your field in particular.

Why do you think it might not be related to sciences?

Interviewee: Yeah, maybe because I haven't heard much about like, I mean, I studied (...) . Um, that's what I did for my research. And then in teaching, I do sense it left and right [00:04:00] now when teaching, I also noticed that UCR students are very adamant about like human rights, about gender discussions.

You know, they're very, uh, proactive in these kinds of topics. Um, I think that's also a generation thing maybe, because for me, like I hear it left and right, but it doesn't really, um, I'm not very involved in the, in the conversation, but I mean, in my field of research being behavioral studies, I don't really, um, hear about it.

But I do think it's important to because I think like the social sciences are more affected by this topic. Yeah, definitely. Yeah. But

Interviewer: also I read some articles about, um, In (...) in particular, how most of the researchers are done within a specific bodies or white bodies, and some argue that this is not representative to other bodies, for instance, or when you talk about mind, people also need to talk about soul, and that sort of gets subjective in sciences.

I just want to hear, do you think it's necessary to include that? These aspects as well. Yeah, so the

Interviewee: alternative [00:05:00] views, I would say. Yeah, it's interesting because I just had a senior project meeting where, um, some of the papers that he addressed seemed more vague to me and less like objective, but I think the whole doctrine that you're being raised in and trained

in, and for me that's already over 10 years ago, I do agree that there is a bias in that and that we have to be aware of that and that it's good that that's changing.

Um, there's also Netflix documentary coded bias, uh, about that. Face recognition being more focused on like Caucasian men. Uh, so I think it's good that we're aware of that and that we're changing, um, The views on it. And I think we're just not very aware of how much this is actually happening. So that's why young people are, young critical people is always good to have in any society because you do see these patterns and you are more critical of them than we are.

I think we're more used to it, but also less aware. When

Interviewer: you mentioned about how students bring up these topics on, uh, on senior [00:06:00] projects, but also in your classes, have you tried to incorporate these different perspectives or have students raised this perspective in class?

Interviewee: Not so much, but I think that really does have to do with the topic.

I do try, um, and I don't know if that relates really to the talk, but like to include more diversity. And also when. Because I notice even our algorithms are tuned to this, you know, so even if I look for pictures, it's mainly like white people. Uh, so I do try to be aware of diversity and also to include different kinds of, um, ethnic backgrounds and examples and papers from different countries.

So I try to have a broader view. I do, I do think it's, I'm not going to say inevitable because I know you won't agree, but it is, as I said, it's, it's almost subliminal. Like we're, we're unaware that this is happening. We, we need to be made aware. I haven't had this discussion in my class as, as much as I think, uh, cause I heard that some students, um, mainly in history classes or like [00:07:00] musical history.

They complain that it's mainly focused on the Western societies. Um, So I think the short answer is no. We haven't had this discussion and I do try to be aware of it, but I don't know. I think it's less prominent in my field than in others.

Interviewer: But do you think it would be important for students to have an additional view within the domain that you teach?

Interviewee: I think so. But I think the first step is to become aware of the problems or the one sidedness of what you present. So I would be happy to, you know, Look at it more critically, maybe with colleagues, like I have one colleague within the cognitive science department, but to, and I know she's also in the EDI committee, I think.

So to become, yeah, to become aware of that and to have that discussion, and maybe also with students to see what students think about how we present our lectures and data. And I know that the book is, is, is pretty much one sided and very focused [00:08:00] on the Western culture.

But at the same time, I wonder if that's really But now we're talking about Western culture more than, uh, like the cultural differences.

I think it's difficult to include a lot of different cultures. So I think if you're in a Western culture, it makes sense that you're focusing on that Western culture. But the awareness, I think, is good to raise and to discuss.

Interviewer: You mentioned about the role of students in incorporating these ideas, but do you think, what role do students in particular play in incorporating this different perspective or the process of decolonization?

Interviewee: think the awareness, that's very important, and that's why I like working with young adults, because you're critical, you're becoming adults, you're seeing more of the world and in a different way than we do. And I think at UCR, we allow students to have that voice and we allow those conversations to be had.

And we are trying to listen. Also, for example, with the gender discussion, like the, the, the pamphlets that are everywhere, like ask about [00:09:00] pronouns and that's making us aware because we're a different generation with different, um, Needs and also different focus. So I don't think for us, the problem seems to be that big as it is for students.

And maybe we're on the one end of the spectrum and you're on the other end of Sometimes it also depends on the people. Uh, but I think creating awareness and, and, and getting that discussion going, even this helps me to just realize that this is a thing, you know, I, I don't think about these things apart from the news items that sort of flash by, uh, but to become aware of it and then become critical of your own curriculum and, um, material.

So mainly that's because you see things that we don't, especially if you've been teaching here for 20 years, you just don't see that anymore. Yeah, that's right.

Interviewer: But what other challenges do you face while attempting to incorporate these perspectives? Would it be in terms of time or resources or the approaches?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think, because I'm thinking of how, if and how I could change this, but it starts with, for example, [00:10:00] the course book, because I know that students complained about something, but there was a course book they used that was very focused on Western society and, and certain successes that were more local than global.

Um, so then we have to be critical about how do we look for another book and are there books that do this, this very well at this point in time, because. First you have awareness, then you have to, things have to be changed, then people have to write a book that is better. Are they available? So that, I think there's a, um, could be a role in students, for students to sort of, Look for better alternatives along with us Because for me that would be the first step like I would have to find another book that actually does this and I don't I don't even know if that's available.

Yeah, so yes time but also the resources that we use it's everywhere You know, it sort of seeps through all the layers of our community So then to change that where do you start like do you start with the material that you use and then your approach and how you? Mm. Communicate this to students. Mm-Hmm.

But I think especially our [00:11:00] students. 'cause you have a certain age and, um, knowledge. Mm-Hmm. . And also a wider cultural knowledge collectively than we here do, especially teachers that haven't been here for a long time. Mm-Hmm. to just have that conversation and to Yeah. Um, yeah. Start, I think the change starts there to have the discussion.

Interviewer: And so you, you mentioned having conversation, but what other, uh. Things is necessary in order to address the challenges you just mentioned that conversation is important.

Interviewee: Yeah, so awareness conversation That's where it starts and then looking for resources. So the research has to be available and the institution has to be Willing to make those changes because I also know that for some of these discussions Some colleagues just, you know, don't care.

They're just like, it's fine the way it is, and that, that is I was thinking while reading into it, it's like a paradigm shift. You know, because our paradigm is just, this is the way it has been going for X years. I'm used to this, I don't see the problem. And younger generations will [00:12:00] always be critical of the system that is in place.

And then the older generations either choose to listen to that and have the discussion and look into it or not. And I think that's, that's a big challenge to change behavior of an institution. And usually the people that are higher up are more experienced, but also have been in an institution for longer.

So to make them change their mind, I think is a difficult topic. Yeah.

Interviewer: That's a really good insight. Maybe some (...). But, um, I wanted to ask you in terms of classrooms, do you think classrooms are. play, serve as an important place to first foster these kind of discussions. Yes. A decolonial, different perspective.

Interviewee: Yeah. And again, and maybe that's a, that's a sort of a rigid view that I have, but I, I don't think in my course particularly, but I think in certain courses, this has a very, um, interesting ground where you already discussed these like in, in law or in humanities or social sciences. Once you discuss those topics, then [00:13:00] you can have the discussions about that.

For example, we talk about (...) and then we can have like real life examples of people that have dementia. And then, then you can really have the discussion or talk about depression where you can have that conversation. Um, but I think the classes, like the courses that deal with these topics and especially here, we're very even with our students.

Like we don't have a strong hierarchy. That's my feeling. Like we were a close community. Uh, and I think we're very open for, to listen to students, uh, voices. And not just the classrooms, like I remember last year we had an EDI, uh, meeting where we had very interesting discussions with students where I attended just as, as me, not as a teacher, but as a person in a community, both UCR, but also like Middelburg, Zeeland and the Netherlands, having to deal with people from different cultures, you also want to listen to their voices and opinions.

So I think those extracurricular. meetings and discussions with the select group of students and teachers that want to change this or want to address it, [00:14:00] um, that would be a good, um, good thing to do outside of the classroom.

Interviewer: Yeah, you sort of mentioned the collaboration between students and faculty. Do you think this plays an important role to foster, like, sort of push this kind of efforts?

Yes. And why do you think it's important to have these faculty students in, like, collaboration?

Interviewee: Because then, like, at the beginning of this year, I know the two students had, were like gaining, um, or getting, um, a petition signed by students because they were frustrated about, I think they had four items and they wanted to complain.

And then I thought, but now we're starting the year, like a battle, you know, us students against, uh, with something with the wellbeing team and a couple more things. Yeah. Yeah. And I think that's a shame because I think if you don't agree with something, the first thing you should do is just talk to each other and see if you can find common grounds and understand each other.

Cause if you start with a whole petition of the student community against faculty, that also doesn't fall well with us. And then you get a sort of a rival, not a rivalry, but like, um, [00:15:00] a negativity around the topic. And I think if we can. Just reach out to both faculty and students and say, this is a topic we want to discuss and address.

Um, maybe have like a guest lecture or somebody who can explain the topic at hand and then have a discussion together and make action points how we're going to change this. Because you need both. You need the student community, but you also need the staff too. agree and be on board. And I think that's more difficult than convincing

Interviewer: students.

Yeah, because I know that you've been on the brainstorming sessions quite a lot. And just to gain your perspective, because this is actually one of the few events at UCR that brings both faculty and students together. Um, from your experience having this discussion, what is something that you find distinctive or different when you have both, Parties together compared to when you are the teacher and when there are students in classrooms, if that makes sense.

Interviewee: Yeah. Um, what I like, well, as I said, you know, I, I sort of stepped down for my function in those [00:16:00] brainstorm sessions. I could see it with Karas as well. Like he was

just him as a person, you know, and he told, talked about his own passions and his own like life and past and you don't in a classroom, you are the material, like you, you present represent the course and the theory.

So you want to convey that, but it's not me personally saying what I think and feel, and that's very different in these sessions, which can also be a little bit dangerous or iffy that if, um, you talk about your personal opinions that might affect your status or how people view you as, um, as a professor.

I think it's good because we are people that are living together in a community and we, we deal with each other every day, but I think it can also sort of affect your. Yeah,

Interviewer: yeah. Definitely. I wanted to ask you, um, In my research I found this protest called Macht the House protest in Amsterdam in 2015, which was about democratization because They were cutting funds.

Are you aware about that? Or if you heard in the news back then? Yeah, sort of. [00:17:00]
Yeah, because it was sort of

Interviewee: in Groningen, where they're sort of, um, I was

Interviewer: also in Groningen, also in Amsterdam in 2015, where they occupied, uh, the Magdenha, Magdenha, I don't know how to say it, Magdenha was here. But do you think like protests as such carried out by students, um, wanting decolonization, also democratization in universities is important to make changes?

Interviewee: Yes, because it shows that this is something that they're very emotional about and conveying that, I mean, you saw how, how much attention it got in the news and I, I remember it. I don't know the details, but I remember that that was a thing and that it just shows that they're, um, almost desperate, you know, like we want to be heard and we, we think this is really a problem.

And I think that is a good goal of protest to, to again, raise awareness. That's the first step, like, Oh, There is a large group of young people that really is adamant about this needing to change and then Hopefully something happens, but I think it does if you if you make it severe enough and [00:18:00] disruptive enough in a way because I think they Were university buildings that they sort of occupied, right?

So they had to cancel classes and so it affected people so then people have to listen Again, I still think that just talking in a nice and calm way is better. But if that doesn't happen, we always have to deal with this hierarchy. So if you're a student and you're a part, like you're becoming a part of this society and institution that has certain, um, practices in place, if you want to change that, a lot needs to happen.

Yeah. So I think protest is a way of doing that with the same with the petition, you know, it's a way, Yeah. of raising awareness and, and, and making a statement. But there always has to be like a friendly phase where you really try to understand each other.

Interviewer: But also going back into when you mentioned that it's sometimes difficult to talk about these things with such colleagues.

But in your opinion, how can, how is it that we can approach these people [00:19:00] and talk about these issues without having conflicts?

Interviewee: I think conflicts are inevitable. But to start with the people that are willing to talk about it, that's an important step and I think for I don't remember exactly but there's this graph of change.

So some people want to change immediately. Some people are like the last ones I think it's also with the new iphone Like some people sort of lag behind and some people are like pioneers and I think with this kind of change you also have that same um Friction so you want to start with the people that are open to the conversation and then slowly gain ground in You familiarity with the topic and then for example after talking to students like with a small work group then we can address it in our department meetings.

But we will always have people that don't want to get on board and like I don't see the problem and it's it's overreacted or you know it's gonna blow over like this is just a phase.

Interviewer: Yeah because sometimes people when talk when people talk about decolonization they say that oh now as a white person I cannot talk [00:20:00] about it.

race or this and that and it's often seen as a Like a buzzword that's often used. Yeah, but what is your perspective in this? Is it it becoming a buzzword or is this just how people are reacting to this?

Interviewee: I think there's always waves of Counteracts, so we have as I said, there was this whole pride about the whole topic Now there's a lot of shame about the topic also about slavery and we're becoming more aware of the details and being more objective about our history and critical um So, yes, I think it's I think Particularly those colleagues or especially older people of other generations think well, this is just a hype and it's gonna It's gonna blow over like fly by Um But something is happening and you can feel it in society and even googling this.

I know that the UVA in Amsterdam is very aware of this and also had a whole like day of workshops and guest lectures about the topic so you can feel that it's gaining [00:21:00] ground Um, and I think you need to sort of push it through in such a way where it becomes a hype and a buzzword and a thing that everybody hears everywhere before people really start looking into it.

Including me now, so. I sort of heard it left and right, like well, apparently that's a thing, but now looking into it I can see. The relevance, and I can also see why students think this is important, because you don't want to have a one sided view of history.

Interviewer: But also at UCR, um, since you're also so much engaged in communities with singing, have you encountered any student initiatives or events that were organized in relation to decolonization or diversification?

Interviewee: Maybe diversification more than decolonization because I think decolonization mainly has to do with the type of theory that we offer and the type of information that we give. I've, as I said, I've heard, I think in one of the music tracks, they were sort of annoyed that it was really focused on Western music.

Uh, and they, I don't know what, who the professor was, but they sort of addressed this and the professor said, we're not going to change this. But then the title of the course, I think addressed something [00:22:00] different than what it actually offered. So that was when I really heard it in UCR. In terms of diversification, we heard a lot about the whole EDI and um, we also had a, because we have UCR day at the beginning of the semester and then we had a whole, not workshop, but um, just tips to look at our syllabus and slides and books and just have a more critical view if we are diverse enough in what we offer.

And um, even just examples of patients, if that's always like Caucasian, uh, elderly, instead of also other. Ethnical groups that we just have to become aware of that, right? So it's it's buzzing. Yeah. Yeah, but it's more the diversification I think than the decolonization.

Interviewer: So you think that these two concepts are different to each other or or can they run parallel?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think of course they have to do with each other but um Yeah, I think they interlink but Theoretically, theoretically speaking. I think the decolonization also has to [00:23:00] do with As I said the focus on certain details in the past which then maybe make like the Caucasian Western culture and society like the best ones and the rest is lesser So they do interlink but I do think it's a slightly different discussion.

Interviewer: Do you think they can be counterproductive in some ways?

Interviewee: Well, they do go hand in hand. So I think if you address the one topic, then you also address the other topic or you, it's easier to become aware of the other problem, if you will. Um, I don't think they have to stand in the way of each other.

Interviewer: Do you?

Well, I, yeah, I think they go hand in hand. Yeah. I do think they go hand in hand. But as a closing thought, how do you envision the future of decolonization, but also in terms of

curriculum focused? How do you envision if you were to have time discussions and everything you mentioned, how would you envision a curriculum that can be decolonized in your field?

Interviewee: Yeah, I, I [00:24:00] think it's, it's, It will take a while that first of all, because it's, it's so many layers, you know, it's not just us here, it's, it's then the Netherlands, like Netherlands universities, then you have Western society that has to become aware of this and make changes. And then the changes, again, our sources are already, um, biased.

So then the sources have to change. And for that, you need to, you know, have publishers that become aware of this and change their content of their books. And that's going to take quite some time. So hopefully, I do think because you can feel our society sort of shifting the paradigm and thoughts about this, I think it will happen.

I just think it will not be like next year. But the awareness is there, the discussion is there, and I think that's going to start the ball rolling and then hopefully eventually also include more objective and complete pictures of, for example, history and in my field. Yeah, that is, it is difficult because [00:25:00] I think a society is prone to focus on its own society and culture.

So to make that change, um, I'm not sure. I hope people will become aware and make those changes. But I wonder to what extent that will be done eventually. Definitely.

Appendix 9: Minutes EDI Discussion Group Minutes

Introduction

- Saswot's personal/senior project
 - Initiatives, operations of boards into expressive decolonial movements
- Consent to include in research
 - Value of the safe space
 - All consent
- Group introductions, name and pronouns
- Goals
 - Understand what everyone knows and thinks about EDI
 - Ideas about applying EDI at UCR

What does EDI mean to you?

- Sense of security
- Programs, initiatives, committees that focus on those issues
- Representation at all levels of the university
 - Student body, staff, curriculum
- Ability for everyone to succeed at a similar level, no barriers to success
- Representation to everyone
 - Staff, student government,
 - Not every person can be represented but for most
- Uplifting minorities and marginalized communities within larger community
- Idea that there was a program in place that would put thinking about marginalized communities at the forefront
 - More than just a bullet point on the lists of other groups
- Thinking about equity > equality

Cases on EDI

- Inspired by workshops from ISO
 - Division of room into Diversity, Inclusion, Exclusion
 - Move to where you think the case stands
- "I do not see color, I treat everyone equally" - exclusion - why?
 - You fail to recognize that there are structural inequalities in society – a way of ignoring the problem
 - Not seeing color is exclusive, but treating everyone equally sounds a lot like inclusion – misleading statement
 - Equality vs. equity – it's a nice idea to go for equality but because not everyone starts with the same opportunities we have to look at differences and acknowledge them

- “In the job application, the underrepresented group in society is given priority to even if other applicants have equal qualifications.” - most in diversity, some in middle ground, some in inclusion
 - Middle ground
 - If you do not see color, then you are ignoring differences, but giving priority depending on difference is including different groups
 - It is diversity but it also moves towards inclusion, first step towards inclusion
 - Diversity
 - Point is not to have full structural inclusion but rather presence of a diverse group – more pointed towards image
 - Quota system diversifies the group without including people in it at a further level
 - An even further experientialization of the exclusion – the system exists to marginalize
 - Lets you in but then leaves you on your own afterwards, makes things better for institutions at a surface level but not for marginalized people
 - Superficiality
 - If a quota is the only step taken, then it isn’t moving towards inclusion
 - : Indian caste quotas
 - : effects on motivation or ambition of marginalized groups?
 - Needs further initiative
 - Quotas look equal on paper – looks like lots of opportunities given – but deeper issues are then disregarded
 - Rebecca: How do you then make choices about candidates, if two candidates were completely equal but for their identities? Is going for the diversity pick the best idea?
 - Susan: Lots of hiring opportunities are based on arbitrary or personal things, like who you know, which marginalized people don’t have the same access and connections. You have to pick what suits the environment best, but it’s all arbitrary in some way.

What is EDI?

- Diversity: being invited to the party
 - Being there
- Inclusion: being invited to dance at the party, being invited to organize the party, organizing the party in a new way
 - Being there at all levels
- Equity

Input from students

- At UCR currently there is an absence of EDI as a committee or structure, decision by the Dean based on various reasons (discussed in Open Council meeting)
 - Participant 1:
 - Was not an EDI committee for a long time, EDI committee had a lot of good ideas once implemented but had very little implementation
 - Reports were written about EDI topics, changing curriculum, etc., but nothing was “done”
 - Want to start implementing things in a more decisive manner
 - Mykoff wrote the last report, make a list of implementable items from her studies
 - Each and every year a course will pick three things from list, starting this coming Spring semester
 - Still want an EDI committee and it will still exist but want to put it closer to where actual decisions are made.
 - EDI committee as part of the educational innovation theme – includes about 10 experts in education.
 - New EDI committee permanently present when curriculum is discussed, changed, altered.
 - Is not abolished but rather redesigned and reinstalled.
 - Permanent representation of EDI in the Council (one of the legal entities)
 - Saswot
 - Council addition as extra layer of workload
 - Disagree with the proposal made by Etienne, EDI becoming a person to represent
 - A person can never be EDI, can not be broadly representative
 - EDI acts as a backbone
 - Participant 1
 - It will not cease to exist, it will actually be strengthened to implement actual change
 - EDI felt too vulnerable as it existed because nothing was changing
 - Participant 2
 - Seems like the EDI is functioning at the curriculum level exclusively
 - Participant 1
 - Not exclusively, but teaching-focused college
 - Integration of EDI into that group would interact with the most fundamental elements of the college
 - Participant 2
 - But then it’s still at the curriculum
 - Participant 3
 - EDI is beyond that
 - Participant 2

- Previous dean told ARC that EDI would be playing an active role in complaints procedures, discipline
 - Will that continue?
- Participant 1
 - Not sure what previous dean meant
 - Legal framework for Dutch universities have to be followed
- Participant 3
 - Afraid that the theme approach would not hit all levels, such as gender neutral bathrooms, etc.
- Participant 1
 - EDI will be thinking about all these things
 - Spreading it out will be better
 - Will be lots of representatives
 - Themes will be instated at many levels
 - Involved in finances, funding for themes will go to EDI
- Saswot
 - Things need to be communicated, appreciate that you came today but it needs to be largely communicated well
 - EDI dissolution was not communicated to students or discussed with students
- Participant 1
 - Discussed with Student Assessor, could have been discussed better
- Participant 4
 - Themes?
- Participant 1
 - Presented about a year ago when he became dean there was more discussion about the themes
 - Data science, sustainability, educational excellence (to be renamed, has to do with the core business of the college)
- Participant 4
 - How do the themes have to do with EDI?
- Participant 5
 - Understanding that it would be integrated into third themes
- Participant 3
 - Still stay in the realm of curricula
- Participant 2
 - Leaving out integral aspects of EDI and narrowing it
- Participant 1
 - You're making it smaller
- Participant 3
 - Having it as a committee would be better
- Participant 1

- But it didn't work
- Participant 5
 - Agree that it didn't work, there was lots of disagreement within the committee, lots of basic arguments about things like pronouns
 - Everything was surface level, could not have reached those surface levels
- Participant 6
 - People were on the committee that should not have been on the committee
 - Better screening for members
 - No centralized or clear powers to enable actors
- Participant 1
 - Better screening is needed
 - If you're in the program, there's power
- Participant 4
 - Why can't it be centralized and representative?
- Participant 1
 - So many staff that don't understand
 - Need to have structures that reach people
- Saswot
 - Will professors be willing to participate in this?
- Participant 1
 - They will have to
- Saswot
 - Professors disagree with things students are doing
- Participant 5
 - Symbolic move on the universities part to dissolve central committee even with positive move of making representation
- Participant 1
 - Offended by this
 - See less possibilities with how it was
- Participant 5
 - Not what I meant, should be changed indeed, but dissolution comes off badly
- Participant 1
 - Intention over impact
- Participant 2
 - Fully integrated EDI is good, but personal concern is that the EDI as envisioned by the Collective was supposed to deal with things not only held within this college directly but things that exist outside the bounds of the university
 - Needs to be a space for students to be supported at a broader level

- Not that EDI should not exist at a curricula level, but that that manifestation of EDI would not cover everything we hoped it would
 - Participant 1
 - Let's do both, think now on what Participant 2 proposes to have a system in place for what would be missed by the reconfiguration
 - Disappointed that things come off so negative and that the intention is so misinterpreted
 - Participant 4
 - Communication issue, even as the Council and the AAC and the student body we heard second hand that EDI as it was would be dissolved
 - It feels like it came from above and from afar
 - Participant 1
 - Baton from previous dean, lots of great ideas but not lots of solid forms of implementation
 - Need to make it more effective
 - Let's sit with Collective, Student Assessor, to come up with structure to help with this
 - Saswot
 - UCU model works well
 - Discusses, delivers, implements
 - The Message of dissolution came off in a way to students that felt threatening
 - Participant 1
 - Let's do both, let's figure out how to solve this
 - Saswot
 - Turn to students, role of EDI at UCR
 - Participant 5
 - UCU's EDI is 4 people, UCR's was 10s
 - Maybe that was a problem
- Role of EDI
 - Inventory on people's experiences at UCR
 - Lots of initiatives but not a lot of contact with individual students to gather information on their experiences and what they want to see what EDI could focus on
 - Sex education and diversity education during intro week
 - International space, lots of different cultures and backgrounds
 - No governing body to ensure what sorts of content is dispersed
 - Existing bodies have limited powers
 - Education needs to happen in orientation
 - Education of faculty
 - Even about things that they think they know

- Student and faculty on Council to maintain ratio, which would be adding someone to AAC (an 8th board member) – not against it, but that's how Participant 3 envisions things working for council
- Focusing on life as a student in Middelburg as a very conservative place, lots of students facing problems with local community
 - How to improve that general situation

EDI as a place for students to go to about everyday problems, boards don't have all the power they need to work on many elements

- Students will come to EDI with deeply upsetting problems, need a counselor or psychologist for immediate help via EDI
 - Avoiding bureaucracy in student assistance
 - Not a white person as an EDI counselor
 - : doing the best to do that, get similar suggestions every week, but it is very difficult to arrange this
- How will people get on the EDI board?
 - Background check, screening, POC members,
 - Coming up with a procedure to shape best committee
 - Interviews, elections
 - You can control procedure, but not who will apply
 - Faculty should apply, and student initiatives/boards should look over it
 - Incentives for professors to apply
 - : no, perverting the motives of professors
 - Accounting for overworking of professors
 - Very frustrating as a student to seduce the professors to care about students
 - : working on this, but it's very hard
 - Buyouts are inherent to academic, service buyouts allow professors to be functional
 - Make service requirements for faculty
- Accessibility and expectations – tuition, laptops, etc.
 - Helping students financially or with budgeting, etc.
 - Better communication about things that already exist
 -

Appendix 10: EDI Proposal to the Management Board

Proposal: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee at UCR

Building on the Strategic document of UCR 2022-2027 “*UCR’s goals are to sustain and foster a more inclusive community for students, faculty, and staff. Diversity refers to the wide array of categories of identity including ethnicity, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic position, philosophical, political, and religious beliefs, and physical and mental ability and challenges*” (UCR Strategic Plan 2022-2027).

The following document includes:

1. Purpose and remit of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee
2. Membership in the Committee
3. Appointment of the EDI Committee
4. Goals of EDI
5. Suggested Working Mechanism
6. Decision Making
7. Reporting and accountability
8. Communication with the Management Board

1. Purpose and remit of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee

- - The Committee leads and supports UCR community of staff and students in working towards achieving its D&I goals, including those relating to specific institutional aims and projects.
- - The remit of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee, broadly conceived, is to identify and amplify good practice as well as areas of improvement; to lead strategic initiatives within the University; and to lobby for change in the wider University as appropriate.

Therefore, the EDI Committee would have an advisory role in the University.

2. Membership in Committees

- - The UCR EDI Committee consists of a Chair, a Vice Chair, and additional committee members, totaling five representatives. Among these positions, three will be reserved for students, while two will be allocated for faculty and staff members. Faculty members will serve a term of two years, whereas students will serve for one year.
- - Additionally, the roles of Chair and Vice Chair will alternate annually. For example, in 2023, a student will assume the Chair position and a faculty/staff member will serve as Vice Chair, while in 2024, a faculty member will take on the role of Chair.
- - The Third student will be a research assistant who will help carry out research related to Diversity issues at UCR. The research assistant work with the members of the Diversity Committee to help develop a broad toolkit, also carrying out research to look into the course structure at UCR that requires attention in the case of making it more inclusive. This section will be further explained later in the section

EDI Internship

- - This internship is carried out by a student which will be advertised through all UCR

communication channels for application.

- - The purpose of this internship is to carry out research and collect data from UCR community.
- - This would involve doing research in topics such as neurodiversity, first generation students,

class, anti-racism, belongings, hidden-disabilities, the role of embedded practices in inclusive education etc.

- - We propose that students taking on this internship to get credits for their work.
- - See example from UCU Diversity Committee internship program :

<https://students.uu.nl/en/university-college-utrecht/academics/curriculum-enrichment/undergraduate-research-assistantship>

3. The Appointment of the EDI Committee

- - The EDI Committee will be appointed via a process of seeking interest from individuals across the university EDI Committee members. The position should be advertised through various university communication channels, including the UCR Newsletter, AAC newsletter, and RASA newsletters to facilitate this.
- - The applicants need to submit a letter of motivation to apply for the position in the EDI committee and their CV.
- - After the applications are closed, a selection committee will be formed that will be composed of the Dean, one representative from AAC, RASA, HAC, the student assessor, and a member of the previous EDI committee.
- - This selection committee will hold interviews with the candidate.
- - The result/ decision needs to be released within 1 week after the interviews.
- - For the special case for this semester, since the EDI committee will be a newly formed body, the

application process will open by November 15th.

- - 25th December will be the final call for the position.
- - The selection committee has to respond to the candidates with a positive or negative response by

December 1st, 2023.

- - Once the committee members have been selected, it is strictly recommended that they participate

in the Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) workshop offered by organizations specializing in such programs, which are available to all.

However, due to internal changes at UCR, this year would be an exception.

- We propose that this year, students and faculty members will have 1 and half year instead of 1 year so that this creates a proper transition for next year so that the EDI committee can elect new members in next academic year (from Fall) for the next one year for students and two years for faculty.

Transition training- between the old and new members

- - After the new EDI committee has been formed, the previous EDI committee members will host transition days where the newly elected members will be invited to internal meetings, meetings with the Management Board, and other internal particularities to ensure smooth transitioning.
- - The transitioning phase needs to take place before the new academic year.

Reference contact ECHO, a non-profit organization that specializes in issues related to D&I for diversity trainings for the newly elected EDI members and for future workshops. <https://echo-net.nl>

4. The Goals of EDI: Curriculum-based and Student environment. A. Department Climate

Cultivate a departmental climate that is welcoming to all and promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion of all students, faculty, and staff.

Integrate conversations on diversity/race/equity/social justice across all aspects of UCR. Identify potential areas of improvement and address those areas positively.

Provide diversity/equity/anti-bias training to students/faculty/staff.
Foster UCR community interconnection through social events and celebrations.

B. Department Structure

Establish an organizational structure within UCR that is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion across all aspects of teaching, research, service, and practice.

Use UCR themes to guide departmental action. Coordinate, assess, and communicate progress.

C. Students body

Create support structures responsive to specific, diverse, and intersectional needs of UCR students.

Connecting students who are in need of fundings. This would be in terms of students from diverse economic background from different countries.

D. Faculty and Staff

Actively recruit, retain, and advance diverse faculty and staff within UCR.
Provide training and support for faculty and staff. See: Echo
Foster strong mentoring relationships among faculty.
Create a work environment attractive to faculty of color and researchers addressing diversity.

Actively recruit applicants of color and women in all job searches.

E. Curriculum

Infuse the values and content of diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the UCR curriculum and curricular-related events.

Include race, social justice, and equity content in all UCR courses including sciences.

Increase diversity of voices in the classroom featured through course readings/guest speakers/case studies.

Host quarterly Race and Social Justice seminars and other equity-focused classes.

Emphasize the need to hate speech policy

Remain in constant communication with Co-Governance bodies at UCR to recommend changes in UCR Curriculum.

The Co-governance bodies include the Program Committee and the University Council.

F. Messaging

Feature department's strengths related to diversity, equity, and inclusion while emphasizing commitment to improving practices and outcomes around these values.

Ensure that the student voice is represented on the committee.

Ensure that university processes and procedures do not discriminate against others.

Invite external parties to suggest ways to make university processes and procedure more inclusive

Recommend training that will equip staff with the skills to challenge inequality and discrimination in the work/study environment.

5. Suggested working mechanism

Each month the Diversity Committee organizes events around one theme, according to the following structure:

The themes can vary from topics related to curriculum changes, accessibility at UCR, inclusion at UCR, scholarship accessibility and others.

This is done to gain student and faculty input on areas that need greater attention.

1. First, A "doing diversity" event. This is a public meeting that will be advertised in all UCR communication channels including student bodies newsletter, in which people present their experiences about a diversity-related topic. This meeting is meant for sharing and listening. Sometimes the EDI committee could offer a workshop and/or lecture/seminar from an expert.
2. Second, an "interventions" round table. This is a public follow-up meeting, during which everybody who has a concrete intervention, suggestion, or idea about the theme of the month can join us: we gather input from the community, and notes will be taken.

3. Third, Harvest session: this is a meeting in which the diversity committee members come together and look at the notes with all inputs from the UCR community. Then the committee has to see what they can do with each of them and who can help meet the needs that have been mentioned in the public meetings. The committee could present these findings to the management board as an advice or recommendation of changes at UCR.

6. Decision making

- - The purpose of the EDI Committee is to advise, advocate, amplify, and support. The Committee decides on how that remit is pursued. Changes to priorities or other aspects of the Committee's program of work can be discussed and decided upon during the academic year where appropriate.
- - At the first meeting of the academic year, the Committee decides on its priorities for the academic year.
- - They need to devise both long-term (A year or two) and short-term goals (a semester-term goal).
- - The EDI Committee Chairs have budgetary responsibility for a budget allocated by the Management Board of UCR.
- - The Chairs are expected to use this budget in support of the strategic priorities as decided by the

Committee. The Chairs decide on the allocation of the budget in consultation with the Committee.

7. Reporting and Accountability

- - The EDI Committee reports to the University Management Team via its Chairs.
- - The EDI Committee should be invited to Management team meetings to update on the work of this committee.
- - The EDI committee meets with the Management Board twice a month to discuss concerns and findings from their engagement with the UCR community.
- - The EDI Committee compiles a brief annual summary of its activities. This summary is published on the EDI Committee's Moodle and is free to access for anyone inside and outside the University.

8. Communications within the Committee and with the School Outside meetings

Communication within the EDI Committee is undertaken via email and MS Teams within the committee Moodle, Emails, Newsletters of the University, and Student Bodies are used to communicate events with the student body.

Reference:

University of Glasgow EDI committee University College Utrecht EDI committee UCR Strategic Document 2022-2027

Appendix 11: Lecture Poster

Queering power: thinking across coloniality, gender, and human-nature relations

Date & Time:

14th
September
2023

18.30–19.30

Location:

Anne 21



Scan this QR to tell us you're coming



Interested in Queerness
and Coloniality? Join Dr
Van De Ree for their
lecture and discussion!

Appendix 12: Lecture Poster

Understanding the Complexities of Intersectionality: Sexuality Religion and Race by Markha Valenta



November 23 | 18:15
Anne-21

Scan this code to tell us you are joining

SNACKS AND DRINKS
PROVIDED



Appendix 13: ECHO- EDI Training Proposal for UCR Co-Governance Bodies

Introduction

Request

Saswot Shrestha, Chair of the University College Roosevelt's Council of Student Representatives reached out to ECHO with a request to facilitate a session for 10 – 15 persons focusing on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and Curriculum Development and Reform.

The intended audience for this workshop includes members of the Co-Governance bodies: UCR Council, Program Committee, Board of Studies, the EDI committee, and the Management Board.

The session will focus on what is necessary to enhance embedding EDI in curriculum development and –reform. In this context the report of Nancy Mykoff is an important point of departure. It provides an overview of what has been done already and what new and remaining issues are necessary to address to maintain and develop a safe and inclusive environment that embraces intersectionality.

In this session we will focus on what is necessary within UCR to enhance:

1. More knowledge and a practice informed strategies on intersectionality. Especially topics related to neurodivergence, race and ethnicity.
2. Strategies to create a safe and inclusive environment. This is not so much an issue for the participants in this session but more a matter of how to engage with other faculty and staff to take necessary steps to create a safe and inclusive study climate on the one hand and what this entails to curriculum development and -reform on the other hand.

About ECHO

ECHO, Center for Diversity Policy, is a non-profit organization focused on diversity and inclusion (D&I) in higher education and the labor market. We have a specific focus on cultural diversity from an intersectional perspective and facilitate in the process of “getting comfortable with the

	<p>uncomfortable". ECHO has almost 30 years of experience as a social enterprise and (inter)national networks in this field of expertise. We work closely with partners in the corporate– and public sector as well as with higher education institutions in and outside of the Netherlands. ECHO collaborates with the VU Amsterdam and sponsors the endowed chair on Diversity in Education.</p> <p>Our approach is based on three pillars:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concepts & Frameworks – Getting comfortable with the uncomfortable: we offer vocabulary to discuss uncomfortable topics in a constructive manner. • Policy & Practice – Colorblind versus Colorbrave: we offer analysis and consultancy regarding colorblind and colorbrave policy and practice. • Networks & Community – Exchanging experiences: we are connected to a broad network of Ambassadors, professionals and organizations that are committed to D&I in their own practices and facilitate exchange of experiences, expertise and good practices.
<p>Approach</p>	
<p>Programme 12.30 – 15.00</p>	
<p>12.30 – 13.15</p>	<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do I begin? • Conditions for a brave space.
<p>13.15 – 14.00</p>	<p>Exploring and reflecting on my intersectional identity (Activity)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are invited to pick an identity aspect that they associate with the biggest challenges in their day-to-day reality. Participants are asked to focus on experiences linked to that specific identity aspect and invited to explain why they picked this identity aspect.

- Participants are asked to pick an identity aspect that increases challenges and discomfort and invited to share why.
- Participants are asked to pick an identity aspect that reduces challenges and discomfort and invited to share why.

Reflections and discussions

- How you use your privilege to contribute to inclusion within UCR?
- What do you need from other students and staff to challenge the exclusion you may experience.
- Why is understanding intersectionality for UCR?

14.00 – 14.45

Defining aims and conditions for a safe and inclusive environment

This is an activity to define the most important aims and conditions for a safe and inclusive environment from an individual and an institutional point of view. This will be done in a few steps and this part will be finalized with a list of 4 (focused and agreed) aims or conditions for the committee to continue conversations after the sessions.

- Participants are asked to write down 4 aims/conditions for a safe and inclusive environment within the context of EDI policy and practice at UCR. (5 minutes)
- The group is split in 3 small groups where participants define a list of 4 aims/conditions based on the individual lists. (10 minutes)
- 3 groups present the list of 4 aims/conditions to each other. (15 minutes)
- The whole group picks 4 aims/conditions from the list of 12.

14.45 – 15.00

Final reflections on what is needed to operationalize the list of final list of 4 aims/conditions for a safe and inclusive environment within the context of EDI policy and practice at UCR.

Final plenary reflections

Reflect and discuss the following closing questions:

- How can you use your privilege to contribute to inclusion within the TUD study environment?
- What do you need from other students and staff to challenge the exclusion you may experien

