

## DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM



In late 2017, British right-wing newspapers created a furore about what they framed as a blatant example of runaway political correctness. Undergraduate students of English Literature at the University of Cambridge had called for their degree programme to be “decolonised”. [Alarmist headlines incorrectly stated](#) that the students had demanded the removal of canonical white figures. The students had in fact called for a much broader curriculum; one that included non-white non-male authors and moved beyond an existing approach that “[elevates white male authors at the expense of all others](#)”. The call for this inclusion of more diverse authors, including from the global south, drew attention because it was discussed at a Teaching Forum at the university.

This movement was similar to causes at other universities. Students at the University of Cape Town had a campaign *Rhodes Must Fall* in 2015, which called for the removal of a statue of Cecil Rhodes, which was seen as a symbol of white supremacy and institutional racism in South Africa. This call for the removal of statues of Cecil Rhodes was mirrored at other universities in South Africa, as well as at Oxford University. University College, London, had a similar campaign, called *Why is My Curriculum White*, which demanded the inclusion of non-white scholars across disciplines and included writers from once colonised countries.

The question for us to consider is: how does this apply to sociology?

In Chapter 2, we discuss the ways in which people of colour were systematically excluded from sociology in two key ways: in the practicing of sociology, and in how the history of sociology has been constructed. Aldon Morris (2015) wrote about the ways that W.E.B. Du Bois had his arguments claimed by other scholars, and how his achievements with the Atlanta School were minimized and even erased. Given this pattern across sociology, we can see the need to critically review what texts are set as essential reading on university sociology programmes and examine whether the diversity of sociologists is appropriately represented.

If you are studying for a sociology degree, one of the ways to think about this is to look at the essential reading (or set texts) for the core theory modules on that degree. Do they include non-white

sociologists? Are there sociologists from the global south? Is the sociological canon on offer being extended to cover those writers that traditionally have been excluded from it?

This kind of analysis will be different dependent on where you live. If you are based in South Africa you might expect to see a significant amount of reading from scholars concerned with Apartheid, just as in Australia you might see more focus on Aboriginal Australians – and the presence of post-colonial theory might be greater than in Britain. Indeed, if you google “decolonizing sociology” you will find a growing number of articles and books about this issue, and many are clearly focussed on particular geographical regions.

As students of sociology, it is important to reflect on your own awareness of the role of whiteness and European colonialism on what is considered the sociological canon—and whether there is a need to decolonise the curriculum at the university where you study.

### *Further Reading*

Rodríguez, E. G., Boatcă, M., & Costa, S. (2010). *Decolonizing European sociology: Transdisciplinary approaches*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Said, E.W. (1978). *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Rogers, M. & Glendon, A.I. (2003). Blood type and personality. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 34, 1099-1112.

Yoshino, K. (1992). *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Enquiry*. London: Routledge.