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Article

Decolonizing social sciences education at the limits of the archive: A response concerning "postcolonial" social science

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Keywords: social science education, critical social science, social theory, postcolonial, decolonial

Highlights:
– Differentiates 'postcolonial' from 'decolonial' social science.
– Defines decolonial strategies of double translation, reverse tutelage, double and decolonial repair.
– Theorizes using South Africa as a theoretical limit and political test case.
– Provides examples of a taught Masters curriculum in Social Theory and a global open educational resource.
– Critiques the limitations of performative decolonization and gestures towards alternatives.

Purpose: This article responds to the topic of 'postcolonial social science education' by exploring strategies for decolonizing the social science 'archive'.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper takes a decolonial-critical social science approach to explore the limit and test cases for decolonizing social science education, using two examples: a Social Theory course in Ireland and a global open educational project, Connected Sociologies.

Findings: It explores three decolonial strategies for social science education: double translation, reverse tutelage, and double repair. It theorizes beyond these by thinking with a more expansive, speculative South African project of decolonial repair.

Research limitations/implications: While the practical strategies for decolonizing social theory and broader, speculative ambitions for decolonial repair are not directly comparable, the contrasting loci enable critical, but hopeful reflection on possibilities for decolonizing social science education more broadly, responding to the limit case imposed by neoliberal academic restructuring.

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1 INTRODUCTION

> To decolonize the university is… to reform it with the aim of creating a less provincial and more open critical cosmopolitan pluriversalism – a task that involves the radical re-founding of our ways of thinking and a transcendence of our disciplinary divisions. The problem of course is whether the university is reformable or whether it is too late. (Mbembe, 2015)
>
> Hope is something that is there to be worked for, is worth working for, and can work. (Seamus Heaney, as cited in Johnson, 2002)

This article starts with the 'post' in 'postcolonial' to critically explore what decolonizing 'postcolonial' social science entails. The 'post' implies critically re-evaluating social science's corpus and its 'archives,' which are unavoidably representative of colonial knowledge and institutional practices. Postcolonial social science education is self-critical about its own colonial foundations, while decolonial social science education challenges the epistemic structure of colonial knowledge while engaging in reconstructing decolonial alternatives. Responding to this special issue's postcolonial focus, this article begins with critical social science's tasks of confronting, re-assessing, or transforming its 'postcolonial' condition. It points to limitations of political decolonization, particularly nativist and chauvinist assumptions that reproduce rather than disrupt colonial knowledge and power structures. Critical reflection problematizes post-colonial state and institutional tendencies to engage in selective denial while maintaining 'colonial archives'. Postcolonial critique and decolonization have acquired new urgency as critical social sciences have come under increasing pressures: limiting critical voices, threatening and closing critical social science courses and departments, atmospheres of increasingly authoritarian state control, and sociopolitical polarization across many countries. Historical colonial injustices are revenant, demanding apologies and reparations (K. Ahmed, 2023), while contemporary forms of colonial genocide are ongoing (International Court of Justice, 2023).

Possible decolonizing approaches for social science education include current efforts to connect and re-contextualize theory globally, revising the canon on which social science education is based, and experiments in operationalizing double translation and reverse tutelage in teaching course curricula. Revisions and alter-globalizations (Pleyers, 2013) of social theory offer alternative foundations for decolonizing social science pedagogies. Revising the foundations starts with critically revising 'classical' social theory (Bhambra & Holmwood, 2021; Connell, 1997, 2007; Steinmetz, 2023). Beyond the canon itself are three decolonial pedagogical possibilities of *double translation*, *reverse tutelage* and *decolonial repair*. 'Double translation' is a strategy for reconstructing theory, curriculum and reading that involves two moves: re-centring the margins and engaging horizontal 'pluriversal' dialogues (hooks 1984; Meghji, 2021, 2024a). 'Reverse tutelage' highlights the importance of bringing wider public knowledge and histories into dialogue with the curriculum, resulting in a reconstitution of the basis of professional social science (Meghji, 2024b). Decolonial repair is a more speculative strategy that looks to society more broadly. Rather than broadening the knowledge base, South African conversations on decolonial repair imply care for the historical injustices of apartheid, attending to demands for truth which cannot be ignored (Gobodo-Madizikela, 2022) or 'anaesthetized' (Mbembe, 2002). Reverse tutelage and decolonial repair take educational efforts beyond theory, re-orienting theoretical education reflexively towards the predicaments and demands of specific publics in the present. Decolonial repair is both speculative and ambitious because it includes all survivors of colonial violence and trauma in its scope of collective transformation. Decolonial repair is a complex and challenging attempt to find ways to exceed the

exclusions of current historical structures, addressing not only the needs of victims of colonial violence and injustice but also including perpetrators and bystanders (Mamdani, 2015).

Decolonial repair pushes social science from its default settings of empiricism and political neutrality to a critical, publicly engaged role for social science that attends to the past but strives to go beyond uncritical commemoration. Decolonial repair is oriented towards inclusive transformation and healing, seeking a different point of departure from Western/ Northern social science's norm of the 'hubris of the zero point' (Castro-Gómez, 2021). Decolonial repair's historically reflexive, speculative imaginary incorporates experiences and voices from the margins, engaging in 'learning to learn from below' (Spivak, 2012; Thapan, 2022). This implies going beyond social science's traditional tools, as decolonial repair frequently leans on creative, imaginative tools offered by the arts and humanities, for example, creative writing, poetry, art practice and music, which offer different ways to express the speculative imaginary of decolonial repair (Gobodo-Madizikela, 2022).

2 METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Critical social science is informed by critical epistemology – a view that knowledge is both historically and structurally constituted and constructed through critique. A critical approach locates the research question: "What does decolonizing social science education entail" in a specific historical and geographical context, deconstructing taken-for-granted understandings (Harvey, 2023, p. 280). The author's situatedness in two public universities – a permanent teaching position in Ireland and a Visiting Professorship in South Africa offered different points of comparison and critical reflection. Teaching experiments were only attempted in the paid position in an Irish public university, which subsequently began to explore the topic of 'decolonizing the curriculum' on an institution-wide basis through its 'Diversity, Equality and Inclusion' initiative. South African universities are more familiar with 'decolonization', being officially required to contribute to post-apartheid societal transformation. Universities are explicitly tasked by the 1997 White Paper on Transformation to recognize apartheid's legacy of inequalities, expand and broaden participation, diversify student and staff representation, respond to societal interests and needs, and provide an enabling institutional environment and culture that embraces and affirms diversity (Council on Higher Education, 1997).

This article's scope is partly theoretical, theorizing by comparing these two contexts to advance a conceptual understanding of what 'decolonizing' social science teaching might entail in places with different postcolonial histories. Ireland is a small, extraverted, white(ly) semiperiphery and 'dual colony' which has both core and peripheral characteristics (Khoo, 2024). Stuart Hall (1980, p. 308) described South Africa during the apartheid regime as a theoretical "limit case" and a political "test case" for colonial racial capitalism and the possibility of transformation – these are deepened by the post-apartheid transition. Hall's juxtaposition of theoretical limit and political test cases helps to link decolonial pedagogies to social transformation across historical and geographical contexts.

To exemplify the question of how to 'decolonize' social science teaching, the author critically reflects on personal experiences of revising and teaching a postgraduate social theory course in Ireland from 2020–22. This theory teaching was not disconnected from theorizing for research, as the author was simultaneously researching, describing and theorizing the re-mobilization of the transformation agenda in South African universities, following the 'Fallist' movement that sparked 'decolonization' agendas after 2015 (Booysen, 2016; Jansen, 2019). The author contributed to discussing and theorizing other efforts to create and teach curriculum between South Africa and

Germany (e.g., Khoo et al., 2020) while also being engaged in researching and teaching ethical methodology and research methods and leading a comparative research project exploring equality and quality in Irish and South African higher education. Theorizing, linking and comparing colonial legacies in Ireland and South Africa unavoidably influenced this article, but this article's scope is limited for practical reasons. Decolonizing social theory involves a globally connected, revisionist project to think and do social science differently, and the background for decolonizing social science in Ireland is more fully explored elsewhere (Khoo, 2024). This article clarifies the difference between post-colonial and decolonial social science while critically reflecting on experiments in revising the most 'classical' of social science curricula, Social Theory. It seeks to explain how the theoretical strategies of double translation, reverse tutelage, and decolonial repair inspired these experiments and offers some critical reflections on the importance of context.

'Decolonizing the curriculum' is an intellectually stimulating prospect that academic teachers and students will likely find engaging and rewarding. However, a critical contextual analysis situates pedagogical strategies within significant general ideological, institutional, and practical obstacles and threats which are far beyond the control of a course instructor. These wider threats to decolonial work can be broadly attributed to neoliberal transformations of higher education, being rooted in trajectories of ideology, power and policy that work to constrain, obstruct and deny the critical power of the social sciences and humanities more generally (e.g., Harvey, 2022; Khoo, 2024; Tight, 2019).

3 DIVERGENT GLOBALIZATIONS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

The social sciences are undergoing broad and divergent processes of globalization, resulting in critical processes of self-examination and reflexivity. Seeing through the 'looking-glass' (Fassin & Steinmetz, 2023) prompts greater epistemic humility and knowledge diversification (Meghji, 2024a). UNESCO (2010) reports enormous growth in social scientific knowledge production and education worldwide. However, global inequalities have widened. Globalization is thus associated with diversification but also with deepening global hierarchies with imperially and colonially structured roots. The social sciences historically expressed and aided colonial relationships, developing complicity with colonial hierarchies. Historically hierarchical, oppressive and extractive structures have evolved into new, entangled forms under academic neoliberalism, enabled by managerialism and new developments in global informational and educational capitalism.

'Decolonizing' the social sciences implies that all is not well with them, but it is not too late. Hope remains that the 'archive' of social science materials, institutions, and imaginaries (Hamilton et al., 2002; Mbembe, 2002) is worth decolonizing, that possibilities exist to reconstitute and transform the archive towards more equalizing, less dehumanizing, and more pluriversal realities (Meghji, 2024b). As the Northern Irish poet Seamus Heaney remarked, on post-apartheid South Africa's potential to change: "hope is not simply optimism that things will turn out for the best. Hope is something that is there to be worked for, is worth working for, and can work" (Johnson, 2002). 'Decolonizing' implies a willingness to work with, and against, what we have, to educate in critical and emancipatory ways, to revise syllabi and change professional practices, and to do social science differently (Khoo 2021, p. 716). It is necessary to notice emancipatory hope, to resist authoritarian assaults on scientific, educational, public, and democratic purposes (Harvey, 2022; Mbembe, 2015). Emancipatory demands for change and transformation push academia towards wider democratic citizenship (Bhambra et al., 2020; Čajková, 2021; Marginson & Xu, 2021) and towards public spaces of alter-globalization (Pleyers, 2013). The theoretical principles of double translation and reverse

tutelage (Meghji, 2021; 2024b) direct academia to join forces with broader social activism against neoliberalism and unjust legacies of colonialism, connecting to local and global struggles against racist, sexist, class, caste, and sectarian divisions, inequalities, and injustices.

However, the academic critical social sciences and humanities are not always in the powerful position that activists often imagine academics to occupy. Academic social sciences are a young and disputed category (Porter & Ross, 2003). In Ireland, they developed relatively recently and weakly before coming under increased pressure (Khoo, 2024), while the social sciences in South Africa have been directly criticized for their roots in colonial conquest and apartheid (Webster, 2021). Over the past four decades, state, market and reactionary actors have pushed to marginalize, instrumentalize, delegitimize, defund, and deny critical aspects of the humanities and social sciences. While these pressures are often rationalized using 'neoliberal' economic or management arguments about efficiency, the real effects are authoritarian – to depoliticize and replace critical debate and diverse, comprehensive conceptions of public good with instrumental policy narrowing, competition, and atomized self-interest (Fassin & Steinmetz, 2023; Khoo, 2024). The troubles experienced by the critical social sciences are further complicated by new technoscientific transformations pushing intrusive technocratic solutions to bypass thought (e.g., Williamson, 2024; Williamson et al., 2024). Academics find it increasingly difficult to think critically and act autonomously, being instead compelled to service commercial informational platforms and participate in global 'games' of reputational ranking and competition (Brøgger, 2016; Demeter, 2019, 2020; Two Convivial Thinkers, 2023).

Despite these challenges, the social sciences continue to expand globally, undergoing critical renewal and enrichment in their objects of study, approaches, methods, theories, and paradigms. Social science has broadened conceptually and methodologically, stretching towards 'post-human' and materialist concerns with life, nature, animals, the planet, cyborgs, infrastructures, information, and the planet (Fassin, 2023). These broad changes invite decolonization to join a critical agenda alongside, and meshing with, diverse critical currents and social movements struggling for equality and justice. These include feminist, anti-racist, ecology, environmental justice and social sustainability struggles and critical global citizenship education. 'Decolonizing' is a route into an alternative, critical and pluriversal 'archive' that confronts and countermands colonial, eugenic, counterinsurgent, authoritarian, patriarchal and biocidal legacies established within the archives of colonial social science (Fassin & Steinmetz, 2023, p. 5).

4 FROM 'POSTCOLONIAL' TO DECOLONIAL

Like the 'postmodern' (Lyotard, 1979/1984), postcolonialism's 'post' is an ambiguous prefix denoting different, overlapping orientations to the present modern/colonial condition (Quijano, 2007). 'Post' may simply mean 'after' without discontinuity or negation, reconstituting coloniality following formal political decolonization. Formal decolonization involves a post-colonial successor replacing the colonial authority. 'Independence' anticipates decolonial dilemmas that begin when the decolonized entity's sovereign boundaries fail the plurality of people and identities that they contain. 'Coloniality' represents a vast history that cannot simply go away at the flip of a historical switch. 'Decolonization' is not a 'zero point' (Castro-Gómez, 2021) but hubris, haunted by continuous contradictions, erasures and resistances – a colonial present (Gregory, 2004).

In Salman Rushdie's novel, "*Midnight's Children*" (1981), Saleem is one of a magical thousand born at the stroke of midnight on the 15th of August 1947, when India's Independence was declared. At one second to midnight, India is a colony, her people subjects of the British Empire. At one second

past midnight, India is officially sovereign. Everything is expected to have changed, but the lives of midnight's children and the possibilities for transformation have yet to unfold. Nationalist and Indigenous social science hoped to construct a future free from colonial dependence, but instead, they reproduced 'the rule of colonial difference' through caste, class and patriarchal power and inequalities (Patel, 2006, 2017, 2021). After gaining the trappings of Independence and democracy, postcolonial regimes began to reinforce the very things they were supposed to fight against (Gobodo-Madizikela, 2022).

Mbembe (2015) drew upon Fanon (1961/2004) to understand South African universities' contemporary decolonization dilemmas. Syllabi, originally designed to serve colonialism and Apartheid, seemed to persist into the post-Apartheid era. Following Fanon, Mbembe questions nationalist and 'Africanization' rhetoric, pointing to problematically chauvinist, anti-African, and anti-foreigner sentiments, and postcolonial elites' self-interested tendencies. Postcolonial critique seeks to deconstruct and displace the systemic premises and discursive apparatus constituting the colonizer-colonized relation. Nationalist and nativist leaders rejected colonialism rhetorically, but nationalist bourgeoisies, including avowedly 'anti-colonial' academics and intellectuals, remained complicit in myriad ways (e.g., Asad, 1973; Mbembe, 2015; Said, 1978; wa Thiong'o, 1986). Parry (2004) offered only 'two cheers' for nativism as a historically necessary force contributing to political decolonization, while other postcolonial critics call for a re-centring of the 'subaltern' (Spivak, 2012). Racial categories may be inverted under the auspices of the post-colonial state without changing the colonial-racial divisive structures. Hountondji (2009) suggested that limited colonial and nativist perspectives should be rejected, in favour of constructing alternative endogenous knowledges that could be connected and global in outlook. A decolonial approach must exceed the formal politics of nativist nationalism, rejecting its exclusions to push decolonization further to be capable of dealing with perspectives from all corners of the world.

'Decolonial' implies challenging the extensive historical hegemony of the present global historical capitalist system and its Eurocentric, 'Western' or 'Northern' hierarchies. It implies work on ontological and epistemological levels. A decolonial approach points to the shortcomings and traps of nativism, 'culturism', and methodological nationalism (Bhambra & Holmwood, 2021; Patel, 2021). The 'post' in postcolonial is messy because there is no clean break or escape from coloniality. Instead, it expresses a desire for emancipation while acknowledging entanglement in a colonial present (Gregory, 2004).

'Postmodernism' normalized discontinuity and self-reflexive critique in modern, Western knowledge following the collapse of 'modernist grand narratives' of (Western) Enlightenment and progress (Lyotard, 1979/1984). However, the theory of coloniality/modernity (Quijano, 2007) pointed to internal fractures and divisions within 'modernist grand narratives'. Lyotard assumed the 'modern' to be a whole that could be replaced with 'street level relativism'. Jameson (1984) critiqued this replacement as the "cultural logic of late capitalism" (Anderson, 1998, p. 98). Enlightenment narratives of progress formed the core of global liberalism and imperialism. Hence, the 'post' prefix inaugurated an era of hegemonic destabilization, threatening depthless relativism, scepticism, and fatalism about the impossibility of alternatives to 'late capitalism'.

Postmodernity and postcoloniality share a common starting point in rejecting over-universalizing generalizations (Khader, 2018; Wynter, 2003). The difference is that postmodern critiques accept Eurocentric generalizations of 'modernity', while post-colonial critiques do not. Post-colonialism critically and self-reflexively confronts the vast colonial/modern complex, constituted by colonial knowledges, institutional infrastructures, science and education. Lugones (2007, 2010) explains

the 'colonial/modern' as a single, internally divided and divisive concept. Internal division is the root of the 'coloniality of power', manifesting through racial and heterosexist hierarchies that masquerade as 'universal' social categories. Binary divisions of knowledges and beings underwrote the historical relations of colonial domination and dispossession, naturalizing the rule of superiors (deemed fully human) over inferiors (deemed subhuman, exploitable, and disposable). Globalization is purported to be a doctrine of homogenization, expanding uneven and hierarchical power-relations and consolidating core-periphery structures (Heilbron, 2023). Imperial and colonial knowledge hegemonies were initially challenged by nationalist anti-colonial discourses, but anti-colonial nationalism was displaced by globalization in the 1990s. The social sciences responded by becoming more global and transnational. International academic and professional associations began to organize transnational research and education along international themes. Research committees and networks extended past national frames. International and global connections, associations and infrastructures offered cosmopolitan alternatives to escape the limitations of nationalist imaginaries and infrastructures.

5 PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES – EXPERIMENTS IN TEACHING SOCIAL THEORY

This section reflects on how decolonial strategies might be operationalized, thinking through an experiment with revising a core Social Theory course in Ireland, part of a taught Masters programme in Politics and Society, between 2020 and 2022. The course was unexpectedly allocated to the author, presenting an opportunity to revise the curriculum in light of major currents of contestation. A first step was to schematically map the 'classical' canon of sociological theory to enable students to see what was considered to be 'classical' or 'core' and begin to ask what might be under-represented or absent. Presences and absences (Table 1) were explicitly discussed, using the sociology of ignorance (McGoey, 2014) as a critical lens. Connell's (1997) critical article on the 'classical canon' of social theory and their treatment in two textbooks was set in conversation with other critical works by Du Bois, Habermas, Foucault, Bourdieu, Hill Collins, Spivak and Haraway. The overall choice of theories and theorists relied on Seidman's (2016) classic critical textbook alongside Bhambra and Holmwood's (2021) revisionist text (Khoo, 2021). This was not a completely new course structure but an intentionally 'globalized' revision, which sought to read classic works from the previous course structure 'sideways' from a marginal perspective, bringing in and highlighting challenges and revisions from decolonial, feminist, critical race, and ecological social theorists and from Global South locations.

Irish social science is not straightforwardly colonial, compared to Bhambra and Holmwood's (2021) revisions of Anglophone colonial modern social theory (Khoo, 2021) or Steinmetz and Fassin's revisionist account of French colonial modern social thought (2023). 'Decolonizing' is a more complicated task in Ireland, a white(ly), diasporic, semi-peripheral 'dual colony', still relatively dominated by religion and the political centre-right (Khoo, 2024). In Ireland, 'theory' and critique are loaded with perceptions of prestige and difficulty, associated with racialized-white and masculinist superiority, but they are also complicated by processes of decolonial disavowal and mimesis (Roque, 2015). Critical theory suffered from powerful detractors dismissing it as 'exotic', leftist, irrelevant, or impractical (Khoo, 2024, p. 86), leading social theory courses to be contradictorily perceived as 'core', 'classical' and prestigious on the one hand, and irrelevant or dispensable on the other. While decolonizing involves recentring, drawing from the margins to define more clearly what the centre is, Ireland is a semi-periphery which ambiguously combines core and peripheral positionings. The margin-centre distinction is unclear, rendering the treatment

of the core-periphery structure ambiguous. The theoretical limit case and political test case can only be approached in the Irish case by actually trying to map existing theories and theorists. The first stage was, therefore, to map and characterize the existing curriculum, visualizing the sparse or empty categories, followed by suggestions to fill the empty spaces (Table 1 additions in bold). This necessitated a pedagogical shift from a focus on close reading of large sections of classical texts, supplemented with contextual and biographical treatment of classical authors, to reading smaller amounts of 'key texts' and relying more on critical contextualization, supplemented with differently located readings illustrating the relationships between margins and centre.

Table 1. SP6122 Social Theory Core Syllabus Map 2020-22

	Before curriculum revision (2019-2020)		After curriculum revision (2020-2021)	
Region	Male	Female/+	Male	Female/+
European Classical	Marx Durkheim Weber		Marx/ **Pradella** Durkheim/ **Fields** **Comte/ DiVanna** Weber/ **Mooney; Zimmerman**	**De Beauvoir**
European Contemporary	Habermas Fourcault Bourdieu Bauman		Habermas/ **Mitzen** Foucault Bourdieu Bauman	**Pateman**
North American Classical	Parsons		Parsons **C Wright Mills**	
North American Contemporary			**Wallerstein** **Burawoy**	**Butler** **Haraway**
Critical Feminist Race Decolonial			**Charles Mills** **Mignolo**	**Connell** **Hill Collins** **Spivak**

Source: Author's SP6122 Social Theory Lecture notes.

The critical, revisionist starting point of core 'classical' social theory was complemented with a 'sideways reading' strategy, pairing classical and contemporary readings. This pairing experimented on the lines suggested by the decolonial strategies of 'double translation' and 'reverse tutelage' to bring the margins to the centre, engaging with publics and social movements. Classical theory was re-framed from the perspective of 'margins-to-centre', examining reception, interpretation and circulation of 'classical' theory involving 'non-classical' locations.

The author was inspired by the motif of 'double repair', which is similar but not identical to the politically speculative and reparative 'decolonial repair' suggested in the South African context, outlined in the Introduction section. Double repair plays with the double meaning of 'repair' to signify both a mending of a precious ('classical') object and a journey of return to a restored and valuable state. Double repair is not the same as decolonial repair's inclusive conceptions of care and reparations for justice, discussed in the South African case. Double repair suggests a return

that restores value to challenged classics while undertaking a journey back to them by a different route, though perhaps this may even mean arriving at a different starting point.

A decolonial reading is one that seeks "an engagement with difference that makes a difference to what was originally thought" (Bhambra 2007, p. 880). The pedagogical strategy of 'sideways reading' de-centres the 'classical' texts by re-centring their reception and circulation (Keim et al., 2014). Examples include reading Comte through an intellectual journey that traces relationships between France and Brazil (DiVanna, 2012) or taking Habermas outside the 'classical' frame to read his work in relation to the reconstitution of global politics and international relations (Mitzen, 2005). Other 'sideways readings' included Karen Fields' (2012) imaginary conversation between Durkheim and Du Bois, Lucia Pradella's (2017) reading of Marx from the Global South, and Mooney's (2012) interpretation of Weber's Protestant Ethic through the lens of a contemporary Sikh sect's entrepreneurialism and decolonization (Zimmerman, 2006).

6 FROM REVISING SOCIAL THEORY TO WIDER CRITICAL PUBLICS

The double repair motif raised the central question about the purpose of theory and theorizing beyond the reconstitution of a social theory canon – the 'archive'. Is the objective a 'golden repair' to visibly restore that which was previously valued? Or is it to take a different journey that brings students and teacher alike along unfamiliar routes, perhaps even to arrive at different points of departure? Like the visual metaphor of the Japanese art of *kintsugi*, a 'golden repair' increases the value of the original classic while restoring its utility. Critical and self-reflexive repair, on the other hand, might take a journey that deviates from the classic's route, not necessarily arriving back at the original point of departure. A double repair may create openings and possibilities to encounter and entertain complexities, as well as speculate about points of arrival that do not reconstruct the past, but this does not necessarily mean that the conditions of speculative inclusion and just care that decolonial repair requires for the past (Gobodo-Madizikela, 2022) will be met.

Meta-disciplines ('social sciences'), disciplines ('sociology'), and course curricula ('Social Theory') constitute colonial 'archives' produced through processes of discriminating selection. A privileged status is given to some texts, while refusing status to others. A social theory syllabus can be revised, with double translation and reverse tutelage leading to new perspectives and knowledge from the margins, but how far does such a revision go? To work with a colonial 'archive', even in revising it, is to inescapably remain with institutionalized materialities, architectures, and instituting imaginaries (Mbembe, 2002). A syllabus is a store that holds the centre of 'classical' theory, even as it strives to disrupt and decentre it by reading it sideways or from the margins. This remains far from the public sociology emphasised by proponents of double translation and reverse tutelage, who centre and try to learn from social movements of resistance like the Zapatistas (Meghji, 2024b). The curricular strategy for revising Social Theory transgresses some limitations, but only some, acknowledging academia's tendencies to do, on a smaller scale, what states do on the larger scale: to deny inconvenient pasts, fail to establish archives, or attempt to 'civilize' through commemoration (Khoo, 2024; Mbembe, 2002).

Decolonial strategies of 'double translation' and 'reverse tutelage' (Meghji, 2021; 2024a, 2024b) point to academia's need to engage with broader publics, hence the MA Social Theory course should not be seen in isolation but in a wider context of teaching experiments reaching beyond university-based academic programmes.

In 2020, the author taught three interdisciplinary postgraduate Masters courses and one undergraduate sociology course within their own university, but also voluntarily contributed to

developing a public, web-based project providing freely-accessible online learning materials for the general public, including pre-university students, 'Connected Sociologies'[1]; Table 2).

Table 2. Disciplinary and interdisciplinary opportunities to decolonize teaching

Example	Learning community/ level	Programme
Connected Sociologies CP	D Web: school, college, university	Discover Society, Global Social Theory
Social Theory	D MA Students	MA Politics and Society
Neocolonialism and Politics of 'Development'	I-D MA Students	MA Culture and Colonialism
Human Rights and Development	I-D MA Students	Gender, Globalisation, Human Rights
Development and Change	D UG Year 3/4	BA Sociology and Politics

Source: Author Presentation to EU COST Action CA1929 Decolonizing Development WG 2, 11 December 2020.

Returning to reflect on this teaching practice in early 2024, it was shocking to realize that two out of the three academic Masters courses have been discontinued since 2020 due to university management requirements that student enrolments demonstrate continuous growth in enrolments. This 'economic' reasoning for cutting courses rested on the application of an inconsistent baseline, requiring the minimum course enrolments to vary between five students (the actual enrolment in 2021 was eight) and thirty students (ten more than the twenty originally proposed as the sustainable basis of a taught Masters programme, and that could comfortably fit in the assigned room). Inconsistent thresholds and impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic proved irrelevant when the decision was taken to discontinue certain course modules and entire programmes. Two years after the Social Theory course began to be re-designed, the course was re-assigned to a different staff member. The following year, 2023, saw the entire MA in Politics and Society programme, which contained the Social Theory course, discontinued. Another established 'flagship' interdisciplinary Masters programme in 'Culture and Colonialism' was also discontinued.

The state is not the only body that holds the power to abolish archives, anaesthetise the past, and prohibit it from stirring up disorder in the present (Mbembe, 2002). Seemingly banal economic decisions by university managers to cut or de-fund courses, programmes or even entire departments have disproportionately impacted the critical social sciences and humanities, regardless of factual financial cost-benefit calculations. A parallel article (Khoo, 2024) describes proposals by the Irish Ministry of Higher Education to abolish the social sciences as a subject group in 2022, demoting the critical social sciences while elevating other disciplines perceived as being less critical. While these proposals have not (yet) been implemented, the proposal shows how easy it could be to abolish entire sections of the social science archive and to make the critical social sciences impossible to reproduce and unavailable to be revised or 'decolonized'. Hopes to transform social science would become detached from any practical possibility of teaching them, let alone teaching them differently.

[1] https://www.youtube.com/@ConnectedSociologies/featured

7 CONCLUSION: PERFORMATIVITY OR TRANSFORMATION AT THE LIMITS OF THE ARCHIVE?

Being constituted by a colonial archive and reconstituting archives is what academics do. Some academics (Two Convivial Thinkers, 2023) are concerned that decolonial claims will too easily become performative, remaining trapped 'in the master's house' (Lorde, 1984). More and more scholars and institutions are proclaiming 'decolonization' initiatives, especially in Western/Northern academia, but decolonial ethics are increasingly difficult to defend in academic spaces that seem largely concerned with individualization, productivity, competition and professionalization (Pereira, 2019, cited in Two Convivial Thinkers 2023, p.356). Even avowedly 'critical' and 'decolonial' scholars may find themselves reproducing the hierarchical 'colonial' patterns they claim to oppose, turning 'decoloniality' into a non-performative, a term that marks the absence and impossibility of the hoped-for conditions (S. Ahmed, 2006).

The risk of performativity does not mean that it is impossible to inhabit colonial archives differently or to critically question or destabilize them, but it does underline the fact that academics are unlikely to succeed on their own. The decolonial strategies of double translation and reverse tutelage require academia to reach out to and combine forces with broader constituencies. Intellectual hope and inspiration can come from broader anti-racist and anti-imperial social justice movements (Bhambra et al., 2020), pointing to broader strategies of 'habitation' and archival reconstitution through collaborations with communities and their living knowledge traditions (Shilliam, 2013). Normative social justice, activist and popular commitments are challenging to mainstream social science education as they exceed the 'neutral' and 'technocratic' positionalities and privileged positions that academics more comfortably inhabit (Two Convivial Thinkers, 2023). Working with students and activist publics is neither easy nor straightforward, and decolonizing work is challenging, difficult, open-ended and far from risk-free. The Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures (GTDF, n.d.) initiative is a rare example that openly recognises how intrinsically difficult decolonizing work can be. 'Decolonizing' initiatives have been gaining popularity across campuses, but they may generate different responses, ranging from indifference to outright hostility (Loyola-Hernández & Gosal, 2022; Two Convivial Thinkers, 2023, p. 360). Decolonizing experiments may not be right for everyone, everywhere, and they may not be suited to scaling up:

> People's histories, investments, attachments, and conscious and unconscious fantasies and desires affect what they expect from their learning experiences. Where they are at in relation to their traumas, fears and insecurities, and what is going on around them, also have a major influence on their capacity to dive into processes that may be difficult and uncomfortable at points. (GTDF, n.d.)

Not all activism that can be linked to academia is necessarily transformative in terms of social progressiveness or social justice. Reactionary and conservative activists and entrepreneurs are mobilizing backlashes, specifically targeting 'decolonization', diversity and anti-racist initiatives as part of an expanding, global right-wing mobilization (Bob, 2013; Mondon & Winter, 2020).

The social sciences present different theoretical, practical, and political 'limit cases' and 'test cases' for education. In South Africa, the project of national transformation has come under strain from neoliberal economic globalization while political forces struggle to reconstitute the transformative project for an inclusive and egalitarian nation (Chari, 2017; Hart, 2013). Having overcome the limit conditions of political Apartheid, South Africa continues to present a definitive political and practical test case for the critical social sciences and humanities to contribute to a broader project

of 'transformation' beyond racial hierarchies while existing within neoliberal globalization's limits. Their post- and de-colonial challenge foregrounds needs to redress epistemic injustice, process unmet demands for truth and reconciliation, and experiment with new strategies for decolonial repair and healing with the help of the arts and humanities (Gobodo-Madizikela, 2022).

While reflecting on and appreciating South Africa's challenges and hopes, the author's own experiments in decolonizing social theory in a very different, small, extraverted semi-periphery, Ireland, proved impossible to sustain under the limit case imposed by neoliberal crisis, academic managerialism and restructuring. Public sociology initiatives to create a free web resource have created an exciting new archive for decolonial social science: Connected Sociologies. However, such initiatives beg the question of who will continue to resource, host, and reconstitute these decolonial non-state archives. The uncertain future for these resources points to the need to build global support for not-for-profit knowledge, education and web publishing, which is in line with the global educational mission of 'Open Educational Resources' (UNESCO, 2019).

As some doors close on teaching experiments in academic theory, perhaps other spaces are opening for academic and institutional experimentation. 'Decolonization' has entered strategic management initiatives to promote organizational 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' (Rutazibwa, 2023; Two Convivial Thinkers, 2023). This may possibly lead to new efforts to define 'quality' to include equality and inclusion through integrated programmes to improve employment practices, student supports, promote equality, inclusion, act against harassment, and integrate inclusive programmes such as "Scholars At Risk" and "Universities of Sanctuary" (Connell, 2019). Experiments to decolonize the curriculum may continue to develop within hospitable spaces and topics in the critical social sciences and humanities, such as organizational studies or sustainable development studies. Nevertheless, neoliberal academia offers a far from stable or dependable base for decolonizing pedagogies. 'Decolonizing' reaches beyond strictly academic frameworks, paradigms and tools, bringing in new, experimental partnerships that may prove to be more resilient than academic pedagogies that fail to integrate the collaborative strategies of decolonial double translation and reverse tutelage. Hybrid spaces that bridge academic and other social worlds have begun to emerge, such as endogenous educational initiatives in Oaxaca and Chiapas, Mexico, GTDF (n.d.), and the University of the Forest[2] in Brazil.

Tuck and Yang's 'decolonisation is not a metaphor' has gained iconic status as the default citation (2016), yet their clear message may easily deteriorate into sloganeering. Decolonization, as a non-metaphor in their specific context, refers to the restitution of First Nations' land and livelihoods. It does not mean something general that the academic social sciences can immediately enact on their own. As Mbembe (2015) articulated, decolonization implies resistance to neoliberal university transformations in the hope that universities may be rehabilitated as a public space through the democratization of access and the development of a sense of ownership. This sense of ownership implies a reconciliation between 'the logic of indictment' and yet-to-emerge, new logics of self-affirmation, interruption and occupation. Decolonial pedagogies must be pedagogies of presence, which enable encounters with a politics of difference beyond performative politics of imitation and repetition. The constrained limit and test cases of higher education under neoliberal pressure point to greater needs and expectations for broadly transformative education. The Sustainable Development Goal target for global education SDG 4.7 re-orients education towards a transformative

[2] https://universityoftheforest.org/

agenda that responds to global challenges, risks and future trends (Bridge 47, 2019; Čajková, 2021) while trying to meet the challenges of global solidarity (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). Decolonizing strategies of double translation, reverse tutelage, double repair and decolonial repair have emerged as the classical academic archive is confronting great pressures, perhaps to the point of collapse. The potential for collapse concerns not only academic programmes or critical disciplines but perhaps the world as we know it and its entire ecological bases (Andreotti, 2021). Spectres of wide-scale collapse re-orient the critical social sciences, even as social science educators struggle to adapt to new pressures and limit conditions.

'Decolonizing' implies different starting points, while multiple crises invoke the decolonial demand to pluralize perspectives, highlighting the 'postnormal' condition of all sciences. In postnormal science, knowledge is contested, stakes are high, and decisions are urgent, necessitating widened peer communities (Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1993). Academics may challenge imperial and colonial forms and tendencies, but they may equally be involved in conservative or reactionary pushbacks. Decolonial strategies of double translation, reverse tutelage, and double repair confront and challenge imperial nostalgia and desires for supremacist privilege and innocence. They point to the necessity for the widened 'peer community' to include broader social activism, but this does not come with any guarantees. Decolonizing the social sciences may help students and educators alike to critically and reflexively encounter transformative pedagogies. Entangled in decoloniality's complexities, students and educators may find that decolonizing the curriculum offers better strategies, tools and resources to 'step up, own up, clean up, grow up, wake up and show up to do what is really needed', to gesture towards decolonial futures (GTDF, n.d.).

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