

Open scholarship and decolonisation in higher education

Thomas Rhys Evans

School of Human Sciences and Institute for Lifecourse Development, University of Greenwich

Abstract

Open scholarship and university decolonisation communities share several values in attempting to promote long-term changes which challenge the problematic status-quo and promote a more representative and accessible research and knowledge infrastructure. Initiatives from these groups often experience similar barriers when attempting to drive such change. The current work therefore argues that further societal progress and justice could be possible with greater collaboration between open scholarship and university decolonisation communities.

Open scholarship is a movement to make “*knowledge of all kinds more accessible, transparent, rigorous, reproducible, replicable, accumulative and inclusive*” (Parsons *et al.*, 2022). Whilst broad, this definition includes a wide range of individual practices and structural changes, including open educational resources, citizen science, open-source software, open peer review and open data, among many others. Such efforts can help tackle many inequalities by challenging, changing or removing exclusionary practices which have been perpetuated by ideological hegemony. For example, pre-printing research on open platforms like the Open Science Framework (osf.io) gives researchers the opportunity to disseminate knowledge and be acknowledged for their contributions, making their work more widely accessible, without the need for either researcher or reader to overcome privileged gatekeeping, approval or financial barriers. Facilitating accessibility and inclusivity are key parts of most models and visions of open scholarship (Syed and Kathawalla, 2022; UNESCO, 2021). For example, open scholarship is considered highly compatible with feminist perspectives (Siegel *et al.*, 2021; Matsick *et al.*, 2021), where exclusion of women, inequalities in invisible labour and recognition, and marginalisation of knowledge created by women, can be challenged. Open scholarship practices are considered predominantly (but not exclusively) positive in helping overcome the precarity faced by minoritised researchers when negotiating power, championing their voice, and democratising knowledge generation and dissemination (Fox *et al.*, 2021; Pownall *et al.*, 2021).

With a similar alignment in values, open scholarship has the potential to be considered part of ‘decolonisation’ efforts (Chan *et al.*, 2022). Decolonising the curriculum (and/or university) represents a broad notion (Meda, 2020), typically referring to a focus on addressing the continued existence of embedded oppression and western privilege (Harvey and Russell-Mundine, 2019) and attempts to achieve better recognition and development of alternative knowledge (Arday *et al.*, 2021). In practice, decolonisation demands transformative change to challenge the disproportionate power represented and perpetuated through the systems and knowledge presented. For example, not to look at how western theories apply to the global south or to see

work from the global south as an 'alternative perspective', but rather to consider and voice (in a genuinely egalitarian way) knowledge created within different areas as contributing to cumulative developments in our shared understanding (Adetula *et al.*, 2022). This work goes beyond developing a diverse curriculum or inclusive assignment to acting on the inequalities, oppression and discrimination perpetuated by current structures, cultures and practices (Dar *et al.*, 2021; Doharty *et al.*, 2021; Hall *et al.*, 2021; Shain *et al.* 2021) towards greater social justice (Dawson, 2020; Gopal, 2021).

These movements of open scholarship and decolonisation are clearly not the same. However, there are several shared values in – and shared barriers to – promoting progression and it is hoped that this work, in elucidating these similarities, will promote further collaboration and synergy between such communities.

Shared values

The open scholarship movement is perceived to rely upon the Mertonian norms which describe the ideal scientific ethos (Chubin, 1985) and include the principles of communism (that researchers have collective ownership of scientific outcomes) and universalism (that assessment of a scientific claim should be independent of the personal attributes of the claimant). These values are often considered to be implicit in the practices adopted (Tennant, 2020) and are often inconsistently achieved (Ross-Hellauer *et al.*, 2022). For example, the financial barriers to publishing with open access means the geographical diversity of represented authors tends to be less than that of non-open access publications (Smith *et al.*, 2021).

Decolonisation is to decentre colonial-driven knowledge, perspectives and practices, instead transforming organisations and knowledge to represent a wide range of inclusive structures, positions and voices. Such work is often framed within certain groups of institutional values, such as 'Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion' (EDI) or anti-racism (Hall *et al.*, 2021), although the specific values and practices represented are commonly contested (Shain *et al.*, 2021).

Both decolonisation and open scholarship share an obvious moral motivation, but there is little consensus in the central values held. Despite this, they demonstrate shared priorities and goals in trying to promote long-term changes which challenge the problematic status quo and promote a more representative and accessible research and knowledge infrastructure. In this manner, developments in each domain are co-dependent. For example, we can better challenge the over-representation of white, male, Eurocentric knowledge when there are fewer barriers for anyone to access, engage with, create and disseminate knowledge. Similarly, we can foster more meaningful collaboration and inclusive environments and thereby create more alternative knowledge, when we transparently recognise and reward different types of contributions to research and knowledge generation (*e.g.*, through use of the CRediT taxonomy; Brand *et al.*, 2015).

Shared barriers

Decolonisation initiatives and open scholarship communities share a number of common barriers when attempting to drive change. For example, within both initiatives, there are plenty of misunderstandings relating to the multifaceted nature and changing scope of action necessary to drive meaningful change. Many universities are currently implementing decolonisation initiatives which do little more than check that the reading list is not entirely white (Schucan, Bird and Pitman, 2020). Changes (if any) to course content and assessment – or indeed to the wider structures and policies of the university – are minimal (Joseph, 2010; Moghli and Kadiwal, 2021). Other similar assumptions are made within open scholarship practices: for example, that sharing datafiles without associated codebooks, data dictionaries or metadata is sufficient for transparency (Buchanan *et al.*, 2021). This being the case, concern continues in relation to both developments about ‘open-washing’ (Parsons *et al.*, 2022) or tokenistic decolonisation work where there is an attempt to ‘tick the box’ without clear quality control (Shain *et al.*, 2021). The institutional softening of more radical changes into narrow individual-level metrics in both decolonisation and open scholarship is common (Engzell and Rohrer, 2020; Shain *et al.*, *op.cit.*) and highlights the shared need for higher standards of implementation and greater structural-level thinking.

To make incremental progress in either domain, holistic and sustained change is required. Initiatives which do not consider all stakeholders (Evans *et al.*, 2022) and which disregard the problems with the wider systems and processes are unlikely to succeed. The status quo tends to be well-defended by those who have historically secured privilege from it and, in consequence, there are often substantial amounts of both structural and individual resistance to any attempt to drive such dramatic change. Some communities (Azevedo *et al.*, 2022) and stakeholders (Evans *et al.*, 2022) are currently making developmental progress and slowly improving standards across institutions and geographical boundaries. Most universities in the United Kingdom have decolonisation groups and there are international open scholarship groups, such as the Framework for Open and Reproducible Research Training (FORRT; Azevedo *et al.*, 2019) for open scholarship pedagogy. Such communities are commonly led by early career researchers and/or those who are most excluded by existing practices (Pownall *et al.*, 2021). Development in these areas is therefore heavily restricted by: the lack of recognition (Allen and Mehler, 2019); the physical, emotional and psychological burdens often experienced in attempting to overcome resistance; and the wider structural issues in higher education, like precarious work contracts (Lopes and Dewan, 2014). Groups attempting to tackle decolonisation and open scholarship simultaneously are only just forming; for example, the Advancing Big Team Reproducible Science through Increased Representation Team (ABRIR; Jeftić *et al.*, 2021). These are integral communities which require sustained support, funding and infrastructure.

Concluding Thoughts

Both open scholarship and university decolonisation practices are of vital importance and require continued investment and championing by many stakeholders. Greater synergy between the communities leading such efforts could maximise positive impact. Open scholarship is about

making things open, but it is crucial to consider what should be open and for whom (Evans, 2022). There is potential for open practices to perpetuate or extend existing inequalities, rather than promote collaborative knowledge development (Bahlai *et al.*, 2019; Cole *et al.*, 2022; Ross-Hellauer *et al.*, 2022) and so the adoption of a decolonisation perspective could maximise the accessibility of work through more thorough consideration of power, geographical differences and diversity in knowledge sources. Similarly, greater sharing and transparency of decolonisation efforts – whether through diversification of viewpoints, dissemination of evidence about specific practices, or the implementation of open materials – would facilitate more rapid developments in understanding and action whilst also exposing superficial practices. Thus, through greater collaboration between the open scholarship and decolonisation communities, we have the potential to drive further societal progress and justice.

Reference list

Adetula, A., Forscher, P.S., Basnight-Brown, D., Azouaghe, S. and IJzerman, H. (2022) 'Psychology should generalize from—not just to—Africa.' *Nature Reviews Psychology*, 1(7), 370-371. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-022-00070-y> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Allen, C. and Mehler, D.M. (2019) 'Open science challenges, benefits and tips in early career and beyond.' *PLoS Biology*, 17(5), e3000246. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3000246> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Arday, J., Zoe Belluigi, D. and Thomas, D. (2021) 'Attempting to break the chain: reimaging inclusive pedagogy and decolonising the curriculum within the academy.' *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 53(3), 298-313. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1773257> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Azevedo, F., Parsons, S., Micheli, L., Strand, J.F., Rinke, E.M., Guay, S., Elsherif, M.M., Quinn, K.A., Wagge, J.R., Steltenpohl, C.N., Kalandadze, T., Vasilev, M.R., Oliveira, C.M., Aczel, B., Miranda, J.F., Galang, C.M.O., Baker, B.J., Pennington, C.R., Marques, T., Lavery, C., Liu, M., Weisberg, Y.J., Evans, T.R., Pownall, M., Clark, K., Albayrak-Aydemir, N., Westwood, S.J., Hartmann, H. and FORRT (2019) *Introducing a Framework for Open and Reproducible Research Training (FORRT)*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/bnh7p> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Opinion Pieces

Azevedo, F., Liu, M., Pennington, C.R., Pownall, M., Evans, T.R., Parsons, S., Elsherif, M.M., Micheli, L. and Westwood, S.J. (2022) 'Towards a culture of open scholarship: the role of pedagogical communities.' *BMC Research Notes*, 15, 75. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13104-022-05944-1> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Bahlai, C., Bartlett, L.J., Burgio, K.R., Fournier, A.M., Keiser, C.N., Poisot, T. and Whitney, K.S. (2019) 'Open science isn't always open to all scientists.' *American Scientist*, 107(2), 78-82. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1511/2019.107.2.78> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Brand, A., Allen, L., Altman, M., Hlava, M. and Scott, J. (2015) 'Beyond authorship: attribution, contribution, collaboration, and credit.' *Learned Publishing*, 28(2), 151-155. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1087/20150211> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Buchanan, E.M., Crain, S.E., Cunningham, A.L., Johnson, H.R., Stash, H., Papadatou-Pastou, M., Isager, P.M., Carlsson, R. and Aczel, B. (2021) 'Getting started creating data dictionaries: How to create a shareable data set.' *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science*, 4(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2515245920928007> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Chan, L., Hall, B., Piron, F., Tandon, R., and Williams, L. (2022) *Open science beyond open access: For and with communities. A step towards the decolonization of knowledge*. Available at: <https://en.ccunesco.ca/-/media/Files/Unesco/Resources/2020/07/OpenScienceDecolonizingKnowledge.pdf> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Chubin, D.E. (1985) 'Open science and closed science: Tradeoffs in a democracy.' *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 10(2), 73-80. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/689511> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Cole, N. L., Reichmann, S. and Ross-Hellauer, T. (2022). *Global Thinking. ON-MERRIT recommendations for maximising equity in open and responsible research*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6276752> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Opinion Pieces

Dar, S., Liu, H., Martinez Dy, A. and Brewis, D.N. (2021) 'The business school is racist: Act up!' *Organization*, 28(4), 695-706. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508420928521> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Dawson, M.C. (2020) 'Rehumanising the university for an alternative future: Decolonisation, alternative epistemologies and cognitive justice.' *Identities*, 27(1), 71-90. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2019.1611072> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Doharty, N., Madriaga, M. and Joseph-Salisbury, R. (2021) 'The university went to 'decolonise' and all they brought back was lousy diversity double-speak! Critical race counter-stories from faculty of colour in 'decolonial' times.' *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 53(3), 233-244. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1769601> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Engzell, P. and Rohrer, J.M. (2021) 'Improving social science: Lessons from the open science movement.' *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 54(2), 297-300. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096520000967> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Evans, T.R. (2022) 'Developments in open data norms.' *Journal of Open Psychology Data*, 10(1), 3. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5334/jopd.60> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Evans, T.R., Pownall, M., Collins, E., Henderson, E.L., Pickering, J.S., O'Mahony, A., Zaneva, M., Jaquiere, M. and Dumbalska, T. (2022) 'A network of change: united action on research integrity.' *BMC Research Notes*, 15, 141. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13104-022-06026-y> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Fox, J., Pearce, K.E., Massanari, A.L., Riles, J.M., Szulc, Ł., Ranjit, Y.S., Trevisan, F., Soriano, C.R.R., Vitak, J., Arora, P. and Ahn, S.J. (2021) 'Open science, closed doors? Countering marginalization through an agenda for ethical, inclusive research in communication.' *Journal of Communication*, 71(5), 764-784. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jgab029> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Gopal, P. (2021) 'On decolonisation and the university.' *Textual Practice*, 35(6), 873-899. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2021.1929561> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Opinion Pieces

Hall, R., Ansley, L., Connolly, P., Loonat, S., Patel, K. and Whitham, B. (2021) 'Struggling for the anti-racist university: learning from an institution-wide response to curriculum decolonisation.' *Teaching in Higher Education*, 26(7-8), 902-919. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1911987> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Harvey, A. and Russell-Mundine, G. (2019) 'Decolonising the curriculum: using graduate qualities to embed Indigenous knowledges at the academic cultural interface.' *Teaching in Higher Education*, 24(6), 789-808. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1508131> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Jeftić, A., Parashar, N. and Iyer, A. (2021) *Unconference (4b) Consortium of psychological scientists and researchers from developing countries: Establishment, vision and agenda*. Available at: <https://osf.io/ra957/> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Joseph, D.T.R. (2010) *Decolonising the curriculum; transforming the university: A discursive perspective*. London: Sage. Available at: <https://www.dut.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/T-JOSEPH.pdf> (Accessed 10 July 2023) (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Lopes, A. and Dewan, I. (2014) 'Precarious pedagogies? The impact of casual and zero-hour contracts in higher education.' *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, 7(8), 28-42. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jfs/vol7/iss7/5> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Matsick, J.L., Kruk, M., Oswald, F. and Palmer, L. (2021) 'Bridging feminist psychology and open science: Feminist tools and shared values inform best practices for science reform.' *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 45(4), 412-429. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843211026564> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Meda, L. (2020) 'Decolonising the curriculum: students' perspectives.' *Africa Education Review*, 17(2), 88-103. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2018.1519372> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Moghli, M.A. and Kadiwal, L. (2021) 'Decolonising the curriculum beyond the surge: Conceptualisation, positionality and conduct.' *London Review of Education*, 19(1), 1-16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.19.1.23> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Parsons, S., Azevedo, F., Elsherif, M.M., Guay, S., Shahim, O.N., Govaart, G.H., Norris, E., O'Mahony, A., Parker, A.J., Todorovic, A., Pennington, C.R. and Aczel, B. (2022) 'A community-sourced glossary of open scholarship terms.' *Nature Human Behaviour*, 6(3), 312-318. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01269-4> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Pownall, M., Talbot, C.V., Henschel, A., Lautarescu, A., Lloyd, K.E., Hartmann, H., Darda, K.M., Tang, K.T., Carmichael-Murphy, P. and Siegel, J.A. (2021) 'Navigating open science as early career feminist researchers.' *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 45(4), 526-539. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843211029255> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Ross-Hellauer, T., Reichmann, S., Cole, N.L., Fessl, A., Klebel, T. and Pontika, N. (2022) 'Dynamics of cumulative advantage and threats to equity in open science: a scoping review.' *Royal Society Open Science*, 9(1), 211032. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.211032> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Schucan Bird, K. and Pitman, L. (2020) 'How diverse is your reading list? Exploring issues of representation and decolonisation in the UK.' *Higher Education*, 79(5), 903-920. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00446-9> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Shain, F., Yıldız, Ü.K., Poku, V. and Gokay, B. (2021) 'From silence to 'strategic advancement': institutional responses to 'decolonising' in higher education in England.' *Teaching in Higher Education*, 26(7-8), 920-936. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1976749> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Siegel, J. A., Calogero, R. M., Eaton, A. A. and Roberts, T. A. (2021) 'Identifying gaps and building bridges between feminist psychology and open science.' *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 45(4), 407-411. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843211044494> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Smith, A.C., Merz, L., Borden, J.B., Gulick, C.K., Kshirsagar, A.R. and Bruna, E.M. (2021) 'Assessing the effect of article processing charges on the geographic diversity of authors using Elsevier's "Mirror Journal" system.' *Quantitative Science Studies*, 2(4), 1123-1143. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1162/qss_a_00157 (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Opinion Pieces

Syed, M. and Kathawalla, U. (2020) 'Cultural psychology, diversity, and representation in open science.' In: McLean, K.C. (ed.) *Cultural methods in psychology: Describing and transforming cultures*. New York: Oxford University Press, 427-454. ISBN: 9780190095949

Tennant, J. (2020) *A value proposition for Open Science*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/k9qhv> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

UNESCO (2021) *UNESCO recommendation on open science*. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379949?posInSet=6&queryId=N-EXPLORE-acdb07eb-a6e4-4efd-bfdf-48908f5947dd> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).