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Interview Conversation

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In Conversation: Decoloniality and Intersectionality in Education

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with **Theresa Schilling**

Abstract

This scholarly interview explores decoloniality and intersectionality in higher education through a conversation with educators Bhargabi Das and Ana Ivasiuc. Drawing on their collaborative and individual teaching experiences, they discuss how everyday pedagogical practices can challenge dominant Western knowledge systems, colonial legacies, and intersecting structures of power. The conversation addresses decolonising curricula, co-creating knowledge with students, recognising marginalised and Indigenous knowledges, and developing flexible, accessible approaches to teaching and assessment. It also considers the limitations of institutional approaches to inclusion, questioning the possibilities of meaningful transformation within the contemporary neoliberal university and contemplating the need for more radical reimagining. Das and Ivasiuc further reflect on students' potential to challenge institutional hierarchies through solidarity and collective resistance. Their reflections position decoloniality as an ongoing commitment and practice, opening possibilities for more equitable, liberatory, and joyful forms of higher education.

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Introduction

Bhargabi Das is Assistant Professor at Shiv Nadar University, Delhi in the Rural Management Programme of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. She completed her PhD in Anthropology at Maynooth University, Ireland as an Irish Research Council scholar where she first collaborated with Ana, a partnership that has continued across continents. Bhargabi's research focuses on Bengali Muslim communities in Assam, exploring state–society relations within politically fragile borderland ecologies, and examining how the rise of majoritarian nationalism reshapes citizenship and vulnerability. Her broader interests include political ecology, religion, nationalism, state, citizenship and decoloniality, an orientation informed both by her academic work and lived experiences in Ireland. Her commitment to critical, care-centred pedagogy was strengthened through co-teaching an ethnographic reading and writing course with Ana, an experience she describes as one of her most meaningful.

Ana Ivasiuc is a Teaching Fellow at University College Dublin, working within the Sociology department, and a researcher at the University of Ostrava. As an Eastern European migrant and precarious academic with a disability, Ana approaches her work from a position that recognises structural marginality within Western academia. Her research focuses on policing, surveillance, securitisation, and the rise of far-right vigilante practices, issues that speak to broader transformations in citizenship and the state amidst ongoing social crises. Ana's collaborative teaching with Bhargabi at Maynooth University, particularly their co-designed ethnographic reading and writing course, shaped her understanding of what decolonial, relational, and egalitarian pedagogy can look like in practice.

Bhargabi and Ana's experience of teaching together formed the basis of their co-authored article, 'CARE: Caring, anti-racist education and decolonial pedagogies in the neoliberal university and a colonial-born discipline',[2] published Open Access in 2025 in the journal *Educação, Sociedade & Culturas*.

As educators and scholars committed to practising 'pedagogies that would become a tool for liberation, equality and decolonial thinking' (Das and Ivasiuc, 2025, p. 16), Bhargabi and Ana were invited to take part in a

[2] Das, B. and Ivasiuc, A. (2025) 'CARE: Caring, anti-racist education and decolonial pedagogies in the neoliberal university and in a discipline of colonial origin', *Educação, Sociedade & Culturas*, 70, pp. 1-20. Available at: https://doi.org/10.24840/esc.vi70.1220.

podcast interview[3] exploring their understandings of and approaches to decoloniality and intersectionality in education. The interview was developed as part of the Erasmus+ Consortium, UNITE*:* University Network for Inclusive and digiTal Education, within a work package focused on innovative and inclusive teaching methodologies. The interview sought to explore the implications of decoloniality and intersectionality for those engaged in teaching and learning and interested in challenging existing mechanisms of exclusion and inequality in higher education.

Mignolo (2017) invites us to engage with decolonial thinking as a way to 'delink [...] from the imposed dichotomies articulated in the West, namely the knower and the known, the subject and the object, theory and praxis' (p. 42), enabling the 're-existence' of knowledges, histories, and modes of being invisibilised and invalidated through settler colonialism. Intersectionality, meanwhile, offers what Collins and Bilge (2016) describe as the 'core insight' that 'major axes of social divisions in a given society at a given time, for example race, class, gender, dis/ability and age, operate not as discrete and mutually exclusive entities but build on each other and work together' (p. 4). Both schools of thought hold profound significance for educators, researchers, and learners, calling for us to critically interrogate the colonial, Eurocentric, and other dominant knowledge systems embedded within educational structures, curricula, and pedagogical practices, while recognising how these intersect with other relations of power and social inequalities within and beyond our classrooms. Furthermore, in approaching the concept of 'inclusion' in education, decoloniality, as Ntsoane (2026) argues, 'shifts the conversation from inclusion as access to inclusion as epistemic justice' (p. 130), while intersectionality may similarly be understood as 'an analytical lens and political tool for fostering a radical social justice agenda' (Bilge, 2013, p. 407). Taken together, these perspectives provide an important starting point for the following conversation. Thinking beyond understandings of inclusion centred solely on representation and access, they orient us towards questions of whose knowledge is valued, whose voices are heard, and how power operates within educational spaces.

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Theresa Schilling: Thank you both for joining me today for this conversation on decoloniality and intersectionality in education. To begin, would you both please introduce yourselves?

Bhargabi Das: I am Bhargabi. I am currently working as an Assistant Professor at Shiv Nadar University, Delhi, in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. I work in the Rural Management Programme. But I did my

[3] You can listen to the related podcast, along with other podcasts produced as part of the UNITE project, here: https://sextantnotes.com/2026/11/17/the-unite-podcast/.

PhD at Maynooth University, Ireland, in the Department of Anthropology, where I actually met Ana. And I think meeting Ana is, I would like to believe, a kind of stroke of destiny because we have managed to keep our collaboration alive, despite moving continents away. And that is purely because I think a lot of our ways of thinking, our ideologies, our belief systems, our kind of obsession to still be in academia, even while it is very difficult to hope in an academy of today, is exactly the same. I think that is what has kept us close and has led to the development of a friendship that I would not have anticipated, but I am tremendously grateful for. And Ana can talk a little bit more about the course because she was the course lecturer for that, so I will leave that to Ana to talk about that. But I also happened to take tutorials for the course, 'Ethnographic Reading and Writing' that she was lecturing, and that was another beautiful collaboration. That collaboration was one of my best learning and pedagogic experiences. I learnt a lot from her and from the students. So I am always grateful for all the collaborations, be it academic or non-academic, with Ana.

Currently, my research interest, however, is not confined to decoloniality. I mostly work with Bengali Muslims in Assam, which is a northeastern state in India. And I particularly look at the state-society relations in these very fluid and vulnerable ecologies called chars, in Northeastern India. And with the coming of a majoritarian Hindu state, through my work, I have also tried to understand how that has shaped or changed relations between the state and the minority communities in the borderland region. So I am really interested in political ecology, religion, citizenship, nationalism, but largely also about how to change the world in a way. I mean, that is the hope. Decoloniality probably is something that is towards that dream. I became personally invested in that conversation because it really impacted me in many ways when I was in Ireland. And it was because of the lived experiences there that I got increasingly interested in understanding how colonial practices are embedded deeply in academic institutes. And I think that conversation brought me closer, and offered me solidarity and friendships across the world, and Ana is one of them.

Ana Ivasiuc: Thank you, that was such an inspiring introduction. I'm currently a teaching fellow at the University College Dublin on a temporary position as an anthropologist in a sociology department, and a researcher at the University of Ostrava until the end of 2027. All in all, I have been precarious in academia for 12 years now. That, together with the fact that I'm a migrant from Eastern Europe—and we both call ourselves migrant knowledge workers—has also positioned me as peripheral in what we think of as the Western, predominantly white academia. I work on Roma-related issues in Europe, more specifically, on issues related to their racial policing in the context of their migration from Eastern to Western Europe, but also on issues of their securitisation and surveillance, which

brought me to work on far-right security vigilantism, and more broadly on how these re-emerging practices in Europe are transforming our notions of the state and of citizenship in the middle of the multiple crises that we are going through.

I want to go back to what Bhargabi started mentioning about our common teaching experience at Maynooth University, which happened two years ago: just a few months ago, we received a message from one of our students who was telling us how she remembers us, and how, in the rainy Irish landscape, she felt motivated to come to class because the two of us were there. It was really a heartwarming message that we both needed at the time we received it, and it meant a lot to us. That teaching experience really shaped how I think about what teaching should be, and what cooperation and collaboration for teaching could look like. The ethnographic reading and writing course was a compulsory module for second-year students in anthropology. We had about 120 students—quite a massive class to be able to practice in smaller groups the art of ethnographic writing—but Bhargabi was doing the tutoring in smaller groups. It was a joy to work together, as we discovered more and more how well our views of pedagogical practices were fitting together.

I think Bhargabi really brought out the best in myself as a teacher. I remember the first time, the first class, I had prepared something very authoritative about the importance of writing: I had written on a slide a quote from Oscar Wilde that said, 'If you don't write well, you can't think well, and if you can't think well, others will do your thinking for you'. And then I asked students what they thought about that quote, and Bhargabi raised her hand and said, 'I'm not sure about it, actually'. Which felt a bit destabilising at first, but then Bhargabi's point was incredibly valid. It was that we have this Western way of thinking about writing as a master tool, and maybe not everyone is comfortable around writing, and of course, we have a lot of people with dyslexia and dyspraxia and all these kinds of things, and so what does it mean to de-centre even that quote? I stood corrected, and so did Oscar Wilde. And that was a really welcome first challenge that Bhargabi addressed to me, and students saw that it was possible to question what I was saying, and that I took heed of it: on the slide, I picked the drawing tool, and I corrected that quote according to Bhargabi's suggestion. That modelled our relationship and our approach from the very first minutes of the module, in the sense that it was not a hierarchical approach but an egalitarian one where we could challenge each other and we could engage in conversation in front of our students. We also received absolutely stellar evaluations for that course, the students were really happy, they said they learned a lot from our decolonial, intersectional approach all the way. For people who have a little bit more knowledge of anthropology: we did not start with Malinowski, who is considered the 'father' of ethnography.

Bhargabi: So-called.

Ana: We knew that he was going to be studied anyway in many of the other modules that the students were going to take, so we started with Zora Neale Hurston, who came from a position of racial marginality, class marginality, but also who is the potential 'mother' of ethnography in ways way more significant than Malinowski.[4] So we started dismantling the Western canon of teaching ethnography from the very get-go. On the basis of that experience, we published an article together in a pedagogical journal called *Educação, Sociedades e Culturas*, which is based in Portugal. The article is called 'CARE: Caring, anti-racist education and decolonial pedagogies in the neoliberal university and a colonial-born discipline'. It's a long title, but we really needed all of that. The article is open access, and there you can read more about our experiences and what we did.

Theresa: Thank you both so much for those introductions. For my first question, I'd like to ask: How do you define decoloniality in the context of education, and why do you think it's critical?

Ana: For me, decoloniality in the context of education really means striving to make the students look and think from a different place. And for me, that place is that of the underdog in society, whoever that underdog is. So Roma, trans people, queer people, people who are not in a privileged socioeconomic position, and so on, and displacing that viewpoint from the points of privilege that we all hold in different measures—and which many of our students also hold in different measures. But above all, also, displacing the viewpoint from the West is, for me, the core of what decolonial teaching is about. It is about seeing global society from the perspective of those for whom the system does not work, and has not worked for a very long time, and grasping its contradictions. The thinking beyond that is that if you are on top of the social hierarchies, you are quickly convinced that our society is a just system with fair rules, and so on. Because if those rules have always worked in your favour, there is no incentive to think of the system as unjust. But when one looks at our rules from the perspective of someone who is, say, Roma, or gay, or trans, or disabled, or more broadly, someone from the Global South, on different axes of privilege/disprivilege, one quickly sees the system for what it is, with all its oppressive structures and its power mechanisms.

I think that colonialism globally and the coloniality of our mind structures are far from being dead. We are in no way in post-colonial times. We are confronted with them on a daily basis, and I think this became very

[4] See Zora Neale Hurston (1990a, 1990b) for examples of her anthropological work.

obvious with what the genocide in Gaza has been able to uncover about our system over the last three years. So, for me, decolonial education should displace the Western privileged view and apprehend the world from a critical point outside of these colonial structures of the mind and of our societies. And this is crucial for me because the core goal of education, for me, is to prepare students to take action for a better world. I think that whatever we do in the classroom really needs to go out there beyond the four walls of our rooms and affect change, for the better of the world.

Bhargabi: I completely echo what Ana was talking about, and I had thought of decoloniality, when I was introduced to this concept, through my lived experiences. For me, decoloniality has been about a constant attempt to create a space, to create a culture, which is really based on principles of equality, principles of justice, care, love, joy in every sense. It is, as Ana said, being consciously able to see how power and privileges work structurally and systematically, such that you then create enabling environments which can then challenge those structures of power and privilege. And I honestly believe that. Meaning, merely having awareness and reflexivity of such power hierarchies in educational spaces is not enough. We have to do more. Decoloniality cannot be simply a spirit to uphold, but let's say a practice that we have to constantly engage with every day. So decoloniality really needs *doing*. It is critical, given how the world today is. Classrooms are one of the last few spaces, I believe, which are left, where we have the hope of possibilities, of a newer imagination. Classrooms are hence critical spaces in themselves, almost like last bastions of hope, of creativity.

My belief is that we might criticise, we might not like the current educational system, but we have to engage with it, and more so change the way it functions in today's systems because the classroom and whatever goes on inside that space really influences and can shape people's politics. It in fact does shape people's politics, and shapes how they engage with the world. It impacts their world-making, how they opine about this world, and challenge the neoliberal, colonial structures and practices that educational institutes are embedded in today. Such a wave of change and engagement, I believe, can only come from within academia. So, the point is, educational institutes and cultures are powerful in their own ways, and we need to use this power in wiser, radical ways to put out people into the world for bringing the changes that we desire and we hope for.

Theresa: Let’s turn to the idea of decolonising the curriculum. It’s a phrase we’ve heard quite a lot over the past decade, particularly in discussions about higher education. But what does it actually mean to decolonise the curriculum? How do you understand this idea, and what do

you think we can do to challenge the dominance of Western ways of thinking and knowing within higher education?

Ana: We have already given some examples of what we did with Bhargabi in this class on ethnographic reading and writing. We have more examples, but I think decolonising the curriculum means, first of all, teaching students how to question colonial ways of thinking, and how these ways have become sedimented. So, actually, equipping them with the tools to understand why we chose to not start with Malinowski, but with Zora Neale Hurston, which is something that we made explicit in the lectures. And I think it is also important to understand from a historical point of view how the West and with it, all the academic avatars of scientism, so-called objectivity, neutrality, positivism, and so on, that the West used to consolidate its power through the production of certain kinds of knowledge that were then posed as authoritative and that have come to dominate and dictate what we think is the truth, and what we think is possible in terms of a better world, better relationships with each other, and with Mother Earth, and so on. So I think the next step, then, is precisely what I was talking about earlier, this displacement of the viewpoint, which entails a continuous questioning. Like Bhargabi said, it's really a daily practice. It doesn't mean that if you do it once, your job is done. You have to do it constantly. It's a Sisyphus task, it means questioning incessantly the concepts and mental representations that we are used to operating with and that we do not so readily question.

The example that I want to give is, in my current class on migration, race, and ethnicity, I start the module with a mockumentary, *Remembering Europe*,[5] which uses the future archive method. Now, this archive method means that the people in the film, who happen to be activists and academics, speak about the time around 2015, 2016, when the documentary was produced, but from the year 2040. So we are in the future. They speak from a point in future history where the nation-state no longer exists, and therefore, all these things, borders, the passport, nationalities, and all these categories of migration that we are so used to thinking about and with—migrant, asylum seeker, refugee, legal migrant, alien, and so on—these categories do not make sense anymore, they no longer exist. The new form of social-political organisation in this future revolves around communities rather than nation-states. National flags have been repurposed to signify, for example, the place where an important community meeting is being held, or the place where food is being cooked for everyone, so it is a completely different world. With this film, the aim is to denaturalise the way we think about borders and make them strange, make them arbitrary, show the harms that they produce, and what a world would mean without borders. Which opens the question of how things can be different. And this is where I'm trying to impart that

[5] Available at: https://thefuturearchiveblog.wordpress.com/remembering-europe/.

impulse from the first class, to then assess at the end whether we got there or not.

It is interesting that the first reaction of students after we watch this mockumentary together—and I've used it in a lot of different modules about security, migration, othering, racism, and so on—inevitably, is to say, 'Oh, well, that can never happen, it's utopian'. And then we follow through with historically-informed discussions about the *recent* emergence of the nation-state (I emphasise 'recent'). So, in the large scheme of the history of humanity, the nation-state is really a fraction of a second old. This also means that if it has not been there all the time, it can die in the very near future, maybe even 2040. And so we manage until the end to question the social reality that is produced by the Western nation-state, with all its forms of oppression. I like to think of this approach as one of radical abolitionism, in which we abolish the limiting ways we think about our world. We make a *tabula rasa* in order to prepare ourselves to think about what we want to replace our oppressive institutions and practices with. That is just an example of getting the students to think in a decolonial way about the surrounding world.

Bhargabi: This is super interesting because I follow a similar line of thought, which is that the introduction of a decolonial pedagogic practice or a technique inside the classroom can make a lot of difference. So I actually just want to add one point to what Ana was talking about. I think, for me, what has also really helped is co-teaching. Everything that Ana has already talked about, such as introduction of lesser circulated, marginalised authors from contexts, from worlds that are not easily or very properly circulated in the world, or particularly in European worlds, the wide world, I think those are, in fact, important. But for me, what has been really valuable is co-teaching. Particularly with Ana I learnt a lot, but even in my current role, where I am teaching in this university, I think co-teaching has added tremendous value in decolonising my pedagogic experience and me as a pedagogue. And, particularly as a pedagogue with regards to my caste, class, and religion positionalities, I occupy a position of an oppressor. In a course where I teach the many powers exercised in Indian society, I co-teach with other colleagues who significantly contribute to my understanding of how, for example, my identity as an upper-caste Hindu can sometimes make me unsighted towards readings, or towards content, or towards certain terminologies surrounding caste, or surrounding religion. And that has really helped. So co-creating knowledge with a diverse set of people, including students, adds to that culture of a liberatory academic space and culture. And that includes curriculum building, even with students. That is a decolonial practice, where we are welcoming and being open as pedagogues to acknowledge students as equal collaborators. And that actually truly makes not just the

curriculum-making practice but also the entire pedagogic practice as a process extremely rich, as well as very reflexive.

So co-teaching and practicing co-creation of knowledge are critical for making academic spaces and practices equal and just. We need more academics from marginalised positionalities in mainstream academia, and we need to give them more safe and secure working environments, who inevitably will challenge western-centered epistemes in their own ways. When I was in Ireland, I was a coloured migrant academic, and a precarious one at that. So it is not a question of if we, the marginalised in varied positionalities, will do the work of challenging the Western knowledge systems or not. I guess we *have to* because there is no other choice. I know it is a burden, but that is how it is. That is the reality. And the minute you have more academics and students from marginalised identities coming into mainstream academia and academic institutes, I think it does impact a lot because we introduce newer contexts, stories, case studies, and life worlds. There is a different logic of knowledge systems in non-Western epistemes and pedagogies, which marginalised academics particularly are consciously trying to bring as part of decolonial practices within academia. So it really makes a difference. We need more of such academics in mainstream academia.

Theresa: I suppose my next question is more about pedagogy. You've both already touched on this a little, not just in terms of challenging what we include in the curriculum, but also in how we approach teaching and learning. I wonder if there's anything else you'd like to add about how a decolonial pedagogy might differ from more traditional teaching approaches and methods? And, importantly, what difference this might make to students' learning experiences?

Ana: I'm very glad that you mentioned methods, and I want to start by problematising, actually, the current pedagogic practices that you see everywhere, and into which we are herded by institutional mechanisms. Some of these pedagogic practices are incredibly coercive and punitive, like punishing students for not submitting an assignment on time. All of these pedagogic practices are centred on preparing students to be disciplined workers for capitalism. I always start with—and this is also how we started, when we taught with Bhargabi—we started with the question of the etymology of the word 'deadline'. It is rare that students know it, and even more rare that they have previously thought about it, so it usually does come as a shock, and it allows us to have a larger discussion about what we are doing in class and what we want to do differently. The etymology of the word 'deadline' comes from the prison world: you have the watchtower, where the guards are making sure that no prisoner escapes, and somewhere on the ground, there is a line that is being drawn, or there is a material obstacle like a wall or a ditch, and if any

prisoner tries to escape or to pass that line, they get shot on sight. So the word has an incredibly oppressive history and genealogy. For me, it is absolutely crucial that we think critically about what it means for us and for our psyche that we have adopted this word and that we use it so often in our daily language. And so I then propose that instead of using the word 'deadline', which is coercive and punitive and has these absolutely sinister genealogies, we recognise that every student is actually a complex human being with complex tasks and complex needs. We recognise that life actually happens, through illnesses and accidents and pressures of all kinds, and everyone has a different weight to carry on their shoulders. And so, from there, I propose that we do not talk of 'deadlines', but of submission dates, which are always flexible. The assignment submission links stay open until the end, and students no longer need to stress about being late for a few minutes or fear for penalties.

This is the other practice that I want to get to, which is the penalties for late submissions. Because to me, applying these penalties to those who do not manage to submit something on time actually risks reproducing the social hierarchies. Those who have care responsibilities, or long commutes, or those who need to work to afford their studies, or those with disabilities, neurodivergence, illnesses—all these kinds of obstacles that we have in our paths when we are not the default white, male, able, class-privileged, and so on—if these people are the ones that end up being penalised, they end up being ranked in the lower rungs of academic grading hierarchies, and therefore, potentially, also later on in their careers. And so adopting this flexibility brought to students a lot of relief. A lot of students either wrote in evaluations or came and talked to us about how relieved they were when they learned that there will be no penalties for late submissions. And the reason for this choice is actually grounded in research: a lot of research shows that people do not learn under stress. So we are kind of self-sabotaging the process of learning if we adopt these coercive practices. Without these coercive and punitive practices, the classroom then can really become what bell hooks and Paolo Freire and others conceptualised as a space for liberation.[6] And then students can focus on content rather than 'deadlines'.

During the course that we co-taught, many students did come to us to express how much this helped them and how effective this was in turning the lecture into a moment of genuine learning, and of creativity, and of freedom, and how that actually benefited their learning process much more than the mainstream approach to it. I also want to add that very often when I have these conversations with other colleagues, other than Bhargabi, of course, and they say, 'Yeah, but what is it that you're teaching them now, if you do that? Because their employer will not be so lenient on them'. And then my answer is to say, 'Well, is it really my role

[6] See hooks (1994) and Freire (1970).

to teach them to be disciplined workers for capitalism? Whose interests are we serving when we do that?'. It seems to me that if you pose the problem that way, then we are supposed to serve the interests of the employer rather than that of shaping the critical thinking of future generations.

Bhargabi: In my current programme where I am teaching, we actually have a lot of students from marginalised backgrounds. So we have a lot of Dalit students, Adivasi students, Indigenous students, women students, mostly coming from farming backgrounds, and they are mostly first-generation learners. So when they come to the classroom, they are sometimes overwhelmed by the space, or by the language of academia. And this language has been historically oppressive for the marginalised. Besides, English, the language of our colonisers, also continues to be a language of power and status and exclusion, and it intimidates the students. But in my experience, these students are tremendous depositors of knowledge. From cropping systems to different plant types, there is so much of Indigenous knowledge that they have. And yet the history of the colonial education system has been such that they are never validated. That is not knowledge, apparently. So what has really informed our pedagogic practice in the programme is particularly to validate and recognise our students as equal and important depositors of knowledge, firstly. In fact, the diversity of students and their knowledge systems that they bring into the classroom and university space is tremendous. We appreciate and encourage and amplify that. But we also teach our classes in vernacular languages, encouraging students to bring their contextual thinking and terminologies.

Besides this, what we do is we use their lived experiences as a starting point for getting into any kind of academic discussions. That also tells them that, 'Look, these are just words. These are concepts that you have already lived, and you have already had different terminologies, probably, in your own language, and a different understanding. But these are not new. You already know them, and in fact, you probably have a more complex and layered understanding of them'. So when pedagogic practices, in my experience, come from such a place, the culture of reproducing oppressive and unjust colonial practices gets mitigated. So, for decolonial pedagogy, one such technique is also for the pedagogue to remain aware and include the diversity that exists in a classroom. But also, as we talk about in the paper that Ana and I have written, in decolonial pedagogic practice, one of the key tools that has really worked in classrooms—even for me, be it in Ireland or in India—is when a pedagogue has been vulnerable, and celebrates and encourages vulnerability in a classroom. And that really is a key pedagogic tool, I believe, in a classroom, and that has worked wonders in my classes.

Theresa: I love that idea of vulnerability because learning can be such a vulnerable experience. And I think there's something really powerful about creating the space for students to recognise and embrace that vulnerability as part of their learning.

I wonder if we could turn now to the idea of intersectionality. Is this a concept or framework that resonates with your own teaching practices? And if so, could you say a little more about how you incorporate this into your teaching?

Bhargabi: Thinking about intersectionality as a practice with decoloniality has largely informed my teaching. And for me, I think, relatability is an important question when I am teaching content in a classroom. So considering, 'How can I connect to the content?', but also, 'How can my students, who come from such diverse backgrounds, who carry different stories, how can they connect to the content?'. So introducing content from newer contexts has definitely helped in my classes. In Ireland, introducing contexts which are mostly marginalised and non-Western in a majorly white classroom generated critical discussions and widening of understanding, but also empathy. For example, in my 'Anthropology of Ethnicity' course that I taught in Ireland, I had brought in stories and cases of ethnic conflicts and ethnic nationalism which had taken place in northeastern India. And those classes really brought out a lot of great discussions, but it was also important that students knew how concepts operationalise or functionalise in non-European and non-white worlds, and they understand these worlds in their complex ways of functioning. It also then challenges how anthropology has always traditionally thought of these societies as simple. I also go for readings or authors in languages apart from English. In my current job, I am doing that a lot, and I think the minute that I read non-English texts, it opens up my mind so much. There are so many knowledge systems that one is not even aware of. Because English as a language, I feel, is not capable, or is consciously ignorant of such logics, of such epistemologies. So I introduce them in my classes, be it through text or poetry or songs or movies, even.

Ana: In my lectures, I think 'intersectional' is probably one of the words that I pronounce the most. Because every analysis has to be intersectional. My students know that. What I would also like to add is that, for me, it is important to have a lot of flexibility in teaching approaches, but also in the assessments. This is continuing the idea that the classroom must be a space of freedom, but also of joy. In the class that we co-taught, we offered different options of assignments, from ethnographic book reviews to weekly learning diaries, or field notes or more creative projects. Also, one of the options was: 'Do you have another idea? Come talk to us'. And someone had, for example, submitted

an ethnographic poem. And so we open the space for everybody to express themselves in the way that they find most inspiring for them.

In a different class that I taught at Maynooth called 'Ethnographies of Crime and Policing', I talk to students about how love is the number one topic in music, but crime and policing is the number two topic. So you have a lot of music around racism in policing and those kinds of issues. So one of the assignment options is doing an annotated music playlist where they choose songs that tackle some of the topics that we talked about; for example, racial policing. Bob Dylan has a famous song called 'The Hurricane', where he recounts the story of a famous African American boxer who got wrongly accused of a murder and imprisoned. One option that fits particularly well with students with dyslexia, for example, is a photo essay. Or even a vlog, where they don't have to write, they just have to film themselves talking about certain spaces or objects. In my class on security and surveillance, I encourage them to film spaces that provoke certain emotions of safety or unsafety and talk about why they think they experience those emotions, and link the material to our class readings and discussions. Also in my current class on surveillance and security, they can do a mini research project that they usually do in a team, where they go and ask students about their perceptions of safety on campus. And they're particularly sensitive to intersectionality, considering questions such as, 'How do women perceive safety in different ways than men, or LGBTQI+ people, or people racialised as others?', and so on and so forth.

Back to the fact that it is extremely important to offer different options: they are there to make space for the students to use their best abilities. Why wouldn't we want them to have good grades? In my classes, I have to say, many of them have very good grades. Because they actually use their best abilities. That caters for different strengths and interests, and it also aims to transform the assessment, part of the module, into a moment of joy. It seems strange when I say to them, 'Enjoy writing your assignment'. It's like, 'What? It's an assignment!'. Yes, but there is no fixed deadline for it, and you can do something fun, something that you are actually enjoying doing. I think that the assignments, also thinking back on my own student years, the assignments that I remember most are the ones which I had the most fun doing.

Theresa: These are such interesting examples from your own teaching experiences, and I think they offer really valuable insights for anyone looking to develop their own decolonial and intersectional teaching practices. I wonder if you could expand a little on how such approaches can challenge more traditional power structures within universities?

Ana: I start from the presumption that learning is never a one-way street. And I emphasise that I am learning a lot from my students as well. I like to also talk about how, when we are in a big lecture theater—at UCD at least—the lecturer is somewhere down below, and the space is like a theatre. So they are actually above me in terms of hierarchy, which I like to emphasise. Throughout the lectures, I show them how they teach me. They teach me about how their generation sees the world, which is not something that I necessarily have access to easily. I learn what is important to them, and I even sometimes learn new concepts from certain areas, such as these very rapidly evolving landscapes of media and tech. One of my students, for example, recently taught me about social cooling, which I initially had no idea what it meant, but essentially it points out the way people on social media feel and know that they are surveilled constantly, and so they engage in practices of self-censorship, which was extremely relevant for what we were doing. And so, from now on, if I teach that class again, there will be something about social cooling that wasn't there this year because I didn't know about it. So my students actually co-produce the knowledge with me. And I don't want to embody the figure of authoritative knowledge in the classroom because I think that that teaches them the wrong thing. If you really want your students to question power, you cannot put yourself in a position of unquestionable power. It's about really doing what we preach. And putting ourselves in that position of vulnerability that Bhargabi was mentioning earlier. So, for example, my students know that they can challenge everything I say, but above all, everything I do. And I encourage them to also approach me if they feel that a grade is unfair. And when they do that, I take a look at their assignments, and I reassess them. And often the ones who do use this freedom are right, and I'm forced to admit that I was wrong, or too harsh, and I tell them, and I change the grade, and that's fine. It's a moment of assessing what is fair. This teaches them that they have power and agency, and they should use it for justice. And I hope that they do that in the outside world, too, for themselves and for others.

I often also speak about how, unfortunately, the university is enmeshed with power, and actually tends to reproduce social hierarchies rather than lead to true emancipation, as it often claims it does. But even these punitive practices actually uncover quite a lot about the rationalities at play in the university. So, for my students, I aim to embody that position of being in the university, but not of the university, like Fred Moten and Stefano Harney were talking about in their book, *The Undercommons* (2013). It's a position of subversiveness and radical critique through which students can retake their power and exert agency on processes that concern them directly. It's a very empowering process. And I do invite them to be unruly, even if that means being unruly against me. It's great when they contest what I say. So I think we should be able to hold that position and to get off the pedestal that has traditionally been built for the

'Professor' with a capital letter. I think we should be in the middle of our students, inspiring and conspiring and instigating for change and for their own empowerment.

Theresa: If we were to think in terms of 'practical steps', what are some steps educators can take in their own classrooms to begin decolonising their teaching practices? What might this look like in practice?

Bhargabi: Historically, universities have been oppressive systems for marginalised communities, and they have contributed tremendously to their further marginalisation. Be it taking away their lands, or devaluing their knowledge systems, or worse, for example, dehumanising them. So I guess they should start with apologising. Apologise, and then recruit. Recruit scholars from marginalised and oppressed communities. Give them a space which is safe and secure, a working environment which is safe and secure. But also welcoming more students, more marginalised students by making university funding systems amenable in a way that prioritises admission of students from such communities. Talking from experience, such students in a classroom space make a huge difference not just in contributing to knowledge but also for changing mindsets of students who come from dominant identities. So I could think of such practical steps, maybe. The other thing was about curriculum making. The politics of curriculum making really has to acknowledge and make space for writings that come from marginalised writers and are about those worlds. I think our logics of curriculum design have to consciously forefront, and unapologetically side with, the oppressed. Always. So that's probably what I was thinking, widely, about what practically universities and educational institutes can do to mitigate this.

Theresa: If you were to imagine an ideal decolonial classroom of the future, what would that look like? And thinking more broadly, what steps could universities take, or what policies could they put in place, to help realise that vision?

Bhargabi: To continue with the practical steps that universities can take to reimagine a decolonial classroom, to reimagine an academia which is equal and just and joyful, include that diversity is not decoloniality. Meaning, just to have figureheads of a diverse set of people coming from particular identities into a room is not decoloniality. We really have to challenge the power structure in radical ways—both in our imagining and doing. I would also like to flag here that there have been a lot of scholars who come from marginalised identities but have equally taken part in forwarding colonial practices within university spaces. So diversity is not the answer to decoloniality. I think DEI policies that universities have, they have to really be respected and upheld in their true sense. They have to be implemented in their true sense. And we have to make a radical

effort to see how neoliberalism and coloniality in academia are deeply connected and enmeshed with each other. So our challenges to this system probably have to address both. For example, while marginalised scholars and students are supported by this decolonial university, universities also have to mitigate the precarity of individualised cultures and really promote a culture of solidarity, of community. And now, in a lot of countries which are ruled by majoritarian and authoritarian regimes, we also require university spaces to be supportive, to have safety around us, to have the backing of university systems. As well as to create that safe space where freedom can be truly exercised. Freedom of speech, freedom of expression, that should be strongly protected by the university community. And the building of such communal experiences and spaces, I think it is critical if we want to move towards a decolonial future within education.

Ana: I'd like to actually problematise the question itself before attempting an answer because, when I teach my students social movements and activism, I explain that there are two approaches broadly, a radical and a reformist one. They come from different logics. A reformist movement would say, 'The system is broken, but we can fix it. So let's tinker here and there, and we'll have a better outcome overall'. And then there's the radical movements who say, 'The system is not broken, the system is actually functioning as intended. This was the intentional way to maintain power structures and social hierarchies as they are'. And I tend to adopt this radical approach when it comes to the role of the university. So the depressing answer to your question is that I'm not sure the university, as it is in its current form, can completely do this, in the sense that it can adopt policies to support meaningful change. So, instead of answering the question of what practical steps universities can take to move toward that future, I'd like a completely different university. I don't think the university in its current form can do this because, if it did, it would mean relinquishing its power. And I don't think the university and academia in general is ready to relinquish power as long as academic positions bestow the kind of privilege that we know we have. But I do dream of a future university, a university of the commons. One that descends from its pedestal and goes into the middle of the communities. One that takes joy in being part of the community, and one that really works towards transforming its social environment to begin with, in these transformative and radically just ways.

So I would advocate for a complete remake of the educational system. And I don't want to predict the future, that's not my place, but maybe wishful thinking would be for our world to actually collapse in the way that it is now, and to be able to be rebuilt on completely different principles. For example, cooperation instead of competition. Think about how much language of competition there is in our university. Competitive grants,

competitive salary, competitive positions: everything is competitive. What if we replace that altogether with the rationality of cooperation? Where it's not about individual academic stars but it's about teams, and it's about what communities do together. Like Bhargabi and I were able to do in our little microcosm. I'm not waiting for the university to take any steps because I don't think it can, and I don't think it will. But it is also our task to create those microcosms in our classrooms, and to prepare our students to do exactly that, to rebuild the world from different perspectives and with different principles at heart.

Theresa: Well, thank you both. I think those are such important interventions. I suppose one of the ongoing challenges in working on projects like this, which are focused on creating a more, quote-unquote, 'inclusive' university, is that we also need to ask some difficult questions about what inclusion really means. And you both raised such important questions here. Is meaningful institutional reform even possible, or is reform itself a useful way of thinking about the kind of change we want to see? And, as you were saying, Bhargabi, having people from diverse backgrounds and positions represented within a university doesn't necessarily mean that we've created a decolonial space. I think these are some of the tensions that we need to confront when thinking about inclusion, diversity, and educational spaces. So thank you both for sharing your insights.

To bring us to our final question, I'd like to turn our attention to the role of students themselves. How can students be agents of change in advocating for more intersectional, inclusive, and decolonial approaches to education?

Bhargabi: Just to deviate, when I had reached Ireland, it was so shocking for me at one point because Irish academia, at least when I was there, was extremely white. And it was visibly very white. And it was also quite shocking for me that the Irish academic space, the university space, was, quote-unquote, 'extremely apolitical'. There was not much political discussion. I remember at that time when I was in Ireland as a PhD student: the stipend is not much, you are in a different country, you are a migrant scholar, and you are struggling with depressing weather and the increasing rent. But there were no conversations around me surrounding, let's say, rent issues or insufficient funding or stipend by the students. In fact, there lacked a sense of community among PhD scholars. And that made me conclude Irish academic spaces—at least at that point, which was seven years ago, 2018—to be extremely apolitical spaces. So what can students do to decolonise or engage in this conversation of decolonising educational spaces and universities? I think the first important thing is that you have to, as students, recognise that university spaces are political. And that is a good thing. That awareness is critical, I think, to foster newer imaginations of the world. Because the minute you

do not see the university system as a political system that has its own flawed logic, that has its own propaganda, ideologies, and agenda to fulfill in the world, then you are not questioning, then you are not reimagining a different kind of a world.

And I mean, as Ana has said, this might be seen as the radical way but I do not think that it is a radical way, I think it is the only way. The only way is to reimagine a different kind of a university. And that can only begin from students being aware that it is, and very validly so, a political space. So you have to collectivise, organise, question, and then voice out, which I think is happening now, more and more so, particularly in Irish academic spaces. And that is also because a lot of students from diverse, marginalised contexts are becoming part of these university spaces, which used to be, at one point, extremely white. Particularly as students, if you occupy the position of the oppressor, then I think, as an oppressor, you have to educate yourself. And I would even say that you should make friendships with diverse positionalities, with both those who have historically been oppressors and who have historically been oppressed. You have to collaborate. Collaborate with them. Learn from those who have been historically oppressed. Because, despite everything, I strongly and unequivocally believe that our students are our hope. No two ways about it.

The journey of decolonising the university is a processual and continued correction. And hence, this is going to be a long fight. This is not going to be an easy fight. And I know that imaginations are important, but it is also a lot of hard and tiresome labour. So there is no one point of resolution, there is no one day that finally we come up with a decolonial, futuristic university. I think somewhere we have to accept that the process of decolonisation is just that: a continued process. And it will continue to happen alongside the violence of the colonial university. This violence will continue alongside the process of decolonisation that we keep engaging in, side by side. And acknowledging that, as people who are part of this process and are passionate, and have no option but to engage in this conversation of decolonisation, I think that acknowledgement is supremely important. And particularly for me, that has been very, very healing. Because, in this journey, you can become extremely angry and you do not know where to put that anger, and you have all the reasons to give up. Particularly when the world in its different ways is throwing brickbats at you and you are a precarious academic, you are an academic of a particular identity. So the only way to stick to the game, to continue with the conversation, to not give up, is to acknowledge that these are the tendencies of colonial violence, and our fight for decolonisation is a continued and side by side fight. Instead of waiting for one fine day of total absolution or revolution or change, this fight of ours is an everyday

one and we must continue our resistance despite and alongside the violence. And that really helps. It helped me.

Theresa: I think that's a lovely way to begin to bring our conversation to a close. Because, yes, I think we need to have conversations like these, we need to find something that fortifies us and helps us to navigate and sustain what can be quite a challenging and, as you've both mentioned, ongoing process.

Before we wrap up, is there anything else either of you would like to add? Perhaps something that's come to mind as you've been listening to each other throughout the conversation, or something you feel we haven't quite touched on but that you'd like to share?

Ana: I was thinking about co-writing another article with you, Bhargabi.

[*Bhargabi and Ana laugh*]

Bhargabi: We are actually using a lot of different techniques now in our classes, Ana! And I know we talked a lot about other things, but this conversation gave us an opportunity to learn about the newer things that we are doing in our classes right now. This was a very healing conversation. Conversations such as these, particularly with people you love, always do that.

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