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**Titre: Foreword**

**Decolonizing the Business School: A journey on paths less travelled**

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**Résumé:** Cet article, qui sert de préface au numéro spécial « Décoloniser la RSE » de la Revue de l'Organisation Responsable, revisite le débat et les perspectives apportés par l'approche décoloniale au niveau théorique, pédagogique et recherche. L'analyse de l'auteur et l'autrice éclaire autrement l'éducation, l'architecture des enseignements et la construction des syllabus de cours, et propose des pistes concrètes pour mettre en pratique la décolonisation des savoirs, et plus particulièrement ceux liés à la RSE, au sein des institutions de l'enseignement supérieur.

**Mots-clés:** décolonialisme ; RSE ; éducation ; enseignement supérieur ; management et théories des organisations

**Abstract:** This paper, which also serves as a foreword to the special issue "Decolonizing CSR" of the Revue de l'Organisation Responsable, reviews the debates and perspectives offered by a decolonial approach at the theoretical, pedagogical and research levels. The authors' analysis sheds new light on education, teaching and the construction of course syllabi, and proposes concrete avenues for putting the decolonization of knowledge, and more specifically that of CSR, into practice within higher education institutions.

**Keywords:** decoloniality ; CSR ; education; higher education; organization and management theory

## DECOLONIZING : DEBATE AND PERSPECTIVE

### Celine:

Bobby, last year, on January 28, 2021, you organized with your Research Centre ETHOS a workshop on the decolonization of business school and university curriculum which brought together more than 500 participants<sup>1</sup>. Can you present the project behind this workshop? According to you, how does this initiative contribute to the social debate on the decolonization of knowledge and practices?

### Bobby:

The January workshop was a second one. We organized the first one last July (2020). It was partly a lot driven by some significant events which impacted our school (formerly Cass Business School). One is, of course, the *Black Lives Matter* movement, which had become an international movement for racial justice following the killing of George Floyd in the US. But there's also been a movement in recent years in the UK, a country that is only now coming to terms with its history of slavery and colonialism.

As you may know, the movement to decolonize universities started in South Africa, beginning with the removal of statues of slave traders in public places. It was a major movement. In the UK however, histories of colonialism, of racism and of slavery are not taught in high schools, there is hardly any recognition of Britain's role as a colonial power. Similar silences can be seen in France. For example the results of a poll carried out in 2014. found that more than 30% of Britons would like it if Britain still had an empire, 59% said the empire was something to be proud of – not ashamed of – and 49% believe that colonies were better off for having been part of it Nevertheless, this decolonization movement has reached the UK.

My institution used to be called Cass Business School and we found out in 2019 that our benefactor, John Cass was an active participant in the slave trade. He was a member of the board of directors of the Royal African company, which was one of the biggest slave trading companies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So obviously, there was an outrage about this. And the university immediately decided to drop the name. This decision had a lot of ramifications, there was a lot of backlash from students and alumni. Many of our students and alumni, because we are a top ranked school, were opposed to the name change and felt that the Cass brand name and their degree for which they had paid a lot of money would be diminished.. We were threatened with lawsuits. So, we went through an entire campaign since then, trying to figure out what we are teaching in the business school. Then we all agreed that it was the right thing to do. But then just changing the name can't be just symbolic. So, we took this as an opportunity to self-reflect as school, on what we are doing. And so our motto now is changing more than a name.

We see that everybody wants to decolonize and it's happening all across UK universities. Also in the settler colonies of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. So I said, fine, let's look at it from a business school perspective. So, that is the reason why we did the workshop last January.

We put the first workshop together in about a week. With very little advertising we had 611 participants who had signed up. It was amazing, there's obviously a lot of interest. Unfortunately, due to technical problems only 400 persons managed to get in, 200 could not.

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<sup>1</sup> Plus d'infos sur le workshop ici : <https://www.cass.city.ac.uk/faculties-and-research/centres/cre>

The two workshops on decolonizing the curriculum attracted more than 800 participants in total from 247 business schools across 39 countries.

I've been going to Academy conferences since 1995. I've never come across a panel that consisted entirely of females of color. So, for the first time of my life, I chaired a panel consisting of women of color as well as Indigenous scholars. There were Indigenous participants from Canada, the US and New Zealand. In this workshop we looked at different aspects of what we teach, how we can bring in issues of race, histories of colonialism into what we are teaching. So, it had a very instrumental purpose. For me, the true outcome is that people will take this spirit away and start doing this on their own, which has already begun to happen. Some participants who were in Accounting and Finance sub-group have started their own workshops.

So I think that outcome was achieved.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS AND HOW TO: A PLEA FOR AN ENTANGLED APPROACH**

### **1. Colonization and Decolonization**

**Celine :**

Decolonization is often defined as the process of undoing colonizing practices by rejecting the universalistic and 'objective' assumptions of Eurocentric and Modern epistemologies (Latour, 1991; Frenkel & Shenhav, 2006) while privileging multiple local histories and other ways of knowing and ways of being in the world (Descola, 2005; Mignolo, 2011:118-122).

How can organizational scholars grasp this approach?

Perhaps we should start by setting out the definitions of colonization and decolonization?

**Bobby:**

Decolonization means very different things. Decolonization means one thing to a black woman working in my school. It can mean one completely different thing for an Algerian man working in your school. It is probably also different for let's say, a Palestinian graffiti artist. It's also different for the CEO of Microsoft. Do they have the same meaning? They don't. Therefore, rather than come up with one common definition, it is important to understand what colonial legacies continue today. Are we unconsciously portraying some white supremacist idea in our curriculum? Like look at the concept of leadership. Are all the leadership theories about white males? What we need to do is to show how these structures exist? How are they perpetuated in our teaching? Another example, in a CSR course, simply putting a case study from an Asian company, rather than an American company, it's not decolonization. Okay, that's diversification. But, it's not decolonization. Because the Asian companies are doing the exact same thing to its stakeholders than the American one. Let's be very clear: simply putting in a brown or a black face on a brochure or textbook is not decolonization.

I think it has to do with everything we teach. We did a workshop at our School following the ETHOS workshop and found a perfect example of what I think decolonization is. In our staff we have a statistician, a great guy. He teaches mathematics. What is there to decolonize mathematics? Well, there is a lot because Western mathematics concepts were predated 200 years before by Arab and Asian scholars. So in the course that my colleague taught included

the work of Francis Galton, a well known and esteemed statistician. Now Galton was also a hardcore racist and was president of the eugenics movement. My colleague approached me by saying "I want to talk about this in my class, it's a statistics class, but nobody's ever talked about this". So, we discussed and decided to use the context of the name change. I told him that the best way to approach this would be to open the dialogue around the drop of the Cass name. He asked his class about the name dropping and they entered discussions. Then he introduced this character. He told them "You've been studying him for four years now. And that it's what he had to say about black people". There was a lot of engagement with the class. At the beginning there were 20% of the student who answered to his question about the name dropping "No, it was not right for Cass to drop its name". At the end of the thing, they all said "Yeah, actually, it is, right". This was a statistician course, not an international business or a culture course. For me it is a very powerful way of not teaching a subject on race but showing how it affects what we do. That does not mean that the theoretical arguments are wrong. But is it possible that some of the scientific experiments done are flawed because of these racist assumptions? Usually that question would never have come up in a stats class. Right? Never. So those I think are small steps, practical steps but very powerful steps. When was the last time anyone had a debate about race in a statistics class in a business school?

I would also like to make a distinction between diversity and decolonization. Because a lot of people end up saying we want to diversify. But diversity is not decolonization. Unfortunately, because diversity is a non-threatening word, what will happen is it will co-opt decolonization. Diversity is hegemonic. Nobody can be openly anti-diversity. Even if they feel like it, they won't say it, right? Whereas decolonization seems a bit uncomfortable to many white people. The question isn't will there be resistance? No, the real issue is how will it be decolonized? That is the real danger. Decolonization could become like a Coca Cola thing, a decaf thing. I'm worried because this has become so popular, is going to lose its meaning, and become like a brand. Or you know, just tick one box. Like, "Look, we have done this". That is what's going to happen. My fear is that it will lose its political edge, it will just become a diversity initiative. You will have a pretty faces of black or brown people on the cover of university brochures without changing the structural forms of racism in the institution.

In the decolonial perspective you have an important theoretical concept which is called the coloniality of power. This concept raises questions of whether colonization is over, the coloniality continues, how is this possible? To explain this theoretically might be a bit hard. I think one of the most profound examples of how this coloniality works, is my friend Stella Nkomo (University of Pretoria). She worked for 25 years in US business schools as the only black professor in her faculty. 25 years ago, when she returned to South Africa she was the only black professor in her faculty. That is, what coloniality of power means. That's how racial structures operate. That's how capitalism operates today. There is no Apartheid in South Africa now, it's been gone for 30 years now. Right, South Africa's democratic country. It's not ruled by a white minority anymore. How can all this go on 25 years later? Because of the coloniality of power.

## **2. Decolonize Education, Curriculum and Teaching**

*“Consider that for more than a century, Indigenous students have been part of a forced assimilation plan—their heritage and knowledge rejected and suppressed, and ignored by the education system” (Battiste, 2013: 23)*

**Celine :**

In the past, schools, and education more generally, have often been used for colonial purposes of forced assimilation. Nowadays, colonialism is more subtle and can be perpetuated through curriculum and programs. From this perspective decolonization is perhaps the ongoing reflection where schools need to consider curriculum, power relations and teach a diverse population of students to be an ally and to work in solidarity with each other. How can business schools engage in this process?

**Bobby**

That is a hard question. First, let's concentrate on the curriculum issue. In the UK, there's been a lot of push to look at the curriculum. There's been a backlash as well. The English literature field is a good example to discuss this. There is a movement which started by the students interestingly at the university, I think it was University College London, about 8 years ago. The students were wondering if it is possible to get a bachelor's degree in English without for example, reading Shakespeare? The answer is no. So, with that question in mind and digging into the curriculum, they asked where are the black philosophers? Where are the Chinese philosophers? Where are the black writers, the novelists, the poets, etc.? And finally, why is my curriculum so white? So, they went out and asked people on the streets these questions. That was the beginning of that movement. As London was the capital of the slave trade, there's some understanding of it.

But there has to be some institutional initiative, like a “top-down stuff” as well. To be precise, all these initiatives must be backed up by funding. We need to get the financial resources. So, one of the things we're doing institutionally at Bayes is very material, for the first time we are offering scholarships for black students. We've actually managed to get the legal clearance to offer two scholarships for black British. It never happened before. Also, we're starting a series of lectures to talk about race and racism. Again, those are small but concrete things. But it shows the institutional support. Small things, but again, we did not have this at any time in the School

**Celine:**

During your workshop I noticed a common point between all participants: the will to entangle our theoretical reflections with our teaching practices. This way is deeply rooted in a concrete and coherent approach. Do you have any examples of practical initiatives related to the decolonization of syllabi to share with us? And how can we benefit from them in our teaching?

**Bobby:**

Analyzing the curriculum and debunking it is one thing. But how do we incorporate this into our teaching is the tricky part. The first point I would like to address is what we call in psychology, the impostor syndrome. How can a white woman or man teach about the history of slavery? The same goes for a course on feminism. Speaking from my own perspective, I know a lot about feminist theory. I read a lot about it. Can I teach feminist theory in a class? Yes, I can. Will I be credible? I don't think so. It depends.

But there are some key things we want to do in practical terms. Because I don't teach a course on decolonization per se, what do I actually do? I've been trying to integrate it into my teaching for over 25 years.

What is lacking in what we teach in business is history.

For example, let's talk about Frederick Taylor's principles of scientific management. Those principles that are even used today to investigate worker productivity, came directly from the American cotton plantations, in the management of slaves. Slave owners held contests to determine which slave would pick the most cotton in a day, and they would give them a small cash prize as a reward. If you were to pick up, let's say, 100 bales of cotton, you were the most productive and you would get a cash award or extra food. The problem was that number then became the *minimum* amount of cotton that slaves were expected to pick.. So, if you did not produce that amount of cotton, they calculated accordingly how many lashes of the whip you would get depending on how much the slave fell short. Where is all this in our management textbooks. So, the question is why these silences?? More important, what are the current implications today of those histories? This is one simple example of how I go about integrating a decolonial perspective into my teaching.

I also link it to the structures of capitalism because you cannot separate decolonization from capitalism. Why? Because of the factors of production. We look at any classical economics textbook on labor, capital, entrepreneurship, or histories of land and histories of labor and we see that they are all colonial formations. So how can you start decolonizing anything without looking at the historical structures of capitalism? This is one concrete thing, add an historical perspective.

I would like to take one last example to clarify my answer to your question about education as a tool for coloniality and the place of business schools in this reflection.

I teach an undergraduate module on climate change. I am asking my students to do an essay to show the links between Black Lives Matter movement and climate activist groups like extinction rebellion. Why are most of climate protesters white, when the people who are dying from climate change are mainly be black people and people of color? There is no easy answer to these kinds of questions, but at least people will start thinking. This is exactly what I think is important to us: asking the question. This is the information age we live in; we have access to too many answers. Any fool can give you answers. But coming up with the right question is the challenge.

### **3. Decolonize Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its teaching**

**Celine :**

In your 2017 article “Transnational politics and translocal governance: The politics of corporate responsibility” published in *Human Relations*, you described CSR as a smokescreen for organizations to hide the socio-environmental impacts of their activities on indigenous communities and vulnerable stakeholders (Banerjee, 2017). Can you elaborate on this?

Do you think there is an urgent need to decolonize CSR?

Although written for a speech on feminist theory at a conference in New York on Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, how can we think about decolonizing the concept of CSR bearing in

mind Audre Lorde's text (1984)<sup>2</sup> "The Master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (29 September, 1979)?

**Bobby:**

The answer to this is not simple because the concept is embedded in capitalism. The way I decolonize it, if you want to use that term, is to show the eurocentrism of the CSR concept. As you mobilize a historical approach in your research on CSR, you will agree with me that the historicity of the concept is deeply rooted in a Western context. And you will also agree with that, in many non-European Western contexts, business has a different relationship with society. It's not always a large capital firm and agency theory is very different. I'm not saying those are positive, they are also very feudal, very patriarchal, but it is a very different way from how Western academy teaches it.

Then, I duplicate the same approach that I just told you about when I teach CSR and stakeholder theory: I look at how these legacies continue today. As you mentioned it, one of my areas of research is on violent mining conflicts between Indigenous communities and big transnational corporations with high profile CSR policies. I looked at how CSR is used as a weapon by big mining companies to dispossess indigenous people. So, I talked about the violence of CSR. These situations are taking place in a supposedly postcolonial but these people are living under colonial conditions. How is it possible? The White man may have gone, but the native elites – who are doing the governing - is using the exact same colonial mode of extraction. You can see these conflicts all over South America, in Brazil, in Chile, in Peru also in Asia, in India, Africa, in North America with the Native American communities.

Take the Dakota Access Pipeline, for example. For the first time in more than 250 years all seven bands of the Sioux nation came together in 2016 to conduct ceremonies to protect their land and water. The last time that happened was when Abraham Lincoln was President. So therefore, I asked myself, how is this post-colonial? They are citizens of the US, right? And I saw the continuity of violence. The protests were violently quelled by militarized police and private security forces with armored vehicles, rubber bullets, mace, water cannons, attack dogs, tear gas, concussion grenades, armed drones and helicopters. The violence used to quell the demonstration was racialized. They were unarmed protesters and in front of them you had attack guns, dogs even stun grenades. I have attended protest marches in London and New York, have spoken at the Occupy movement protests, which were mainly white, . And while, yes, I have seen people arrested by the police, I did not see any attack dogs or stun grenades. Those tactics are not used against white protesters. So, there's a racialized element to this, there is a colonial element to this, and this not happened 200 years ago, it happened 6 years ago. It's even happening now as we speak.

So how come? Who are the companies involved in these conflicts? These companies have received awards for CSR, for stakeholders' best practices. Then why are people being killed? It means two things, either they're not implementing it properly, or there's something seriously wrong with the concept of CSR. CSR as greenwashing is easy, everybody knows that. But CSR now is used as a smokescreen to carry on violence. And that's the decolonization part. I use these very concrete examples in my course and insert some historical elements. So, people will argue, and I will put the evidence up. Then, I will ask why this is not happening to all protesters? What other explanation than coloniality? I've always had very good discussions

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<sup>2</sup> Audre Lorde (1934-1992) était une femme afro-américaine lesbienne poétesse activiste des droits civiques aux USA survivante d'un cancer du sein mère et autrice féministe.

with students. People have been uncomfortable but in a positive way. It's not to tell people what to think, my questions lead to be critical, to think about those things.

## **ADVICE AND VENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

**Celine:**

[What would you recommend to scholars willing to engage in the process of decolonization?](#)

**Bobby:**

As scholars what we can do is problematize it. The students will not understand the theoretical argument as much. Show concrete examples: how do corporations extract wealth by killing people? That's my research. I can give you hundreds of examples where that is the case, a lot of wealth is created. I'm not even talking about environmental problems. I'm talking about human beings being dispossessed. Being killed. How does that happen when a company with strong CSR policies is involved in these conflicts?

So let's talk about examples. Right. And the problem with and this is not about decolonization is this is the fundamental flaw in the concept, right? CSR is not always about win-win but also win-lose where the company wins but the community l

So to all the 600+ people who signed up for the workshop, I say to them we should just go and do our own workshops. So take this to your schools institutions and find some key people. Get staff involved in this, get some experts to come and talk to but do something practical, not just to talk. For example, take a real syllabus and say 'I want to include more voices from some other sources into this. How do I do that?' It's a matter of being a part of the movement.

Finally building some special issue like yours that's one way to go in terms of research. Inequality has become very hot, very sexy research topic, everyone talks about inequality. Also race or racial injustice. Those things never happened five or six years ago. So, there is some momentum. Those are the small, small ways but we continue to extend the conversation.

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