

**Race and Ethnicity hub:**

*Developing stamina for decolonising HE*

**Sharon Stein:**

SHARON STEIN: Well, thank you very much for having me. As was said, I'm Dr. Sharon Stein. I'm at the University of British Columbia, which is located on the traditional ancestral unseeded territory of the Musqueam Indigenous people, and we have been asked to make this statement every time we are speaking in a public event, even a virtual event, to acknowledge the traditional caretakers of this place and also to acknowledge the ongoing colonial violence that allows us to be here today. So that is, of course, related to the topic of today's talk, and I know the context is very different in the UK, but I'm looking forward to seeing how we can make some connections between our different contexts. So next slide, please.

OK, so I thought I would start out by saying a bit about my approach to decolonization because at this point, there are so many different ways of approaching this work and I think it's important to kind of set the stage for the approach that I take and what it's influenced by. To the next.

So, a lot of my work in this area is influenced by 2 collectives that I work with. One, is the gesturing towards different futures collective, which is an arts, education, and ecology collective of researchers from around the world, as well as indigenous communities who are interested in pedagogical approaches to what it might look like to gesture towards declonial futures. And I'll say a bit more in a few minutes about why we frame it as gesturing towards decolonial futures as opposed to saying that we are doing decolonisation. And then, I have the critical internationalization studies network, which is a sort of big tent group of scholars and practitioners who work in the area of internationalization with an emphasis on critical approaches to the ways that mainstream internationalization tends to reproduce colonial patterns of representation and resource distribution in the practice of internationalization. Next.

So, as I said, the reason we say in the collective that we're gesturing towards decolonial our future is because we know that this is not a one-time thing, decolonization. It's an ongoing practice and requires a long-term commitment, and we want to emphasize and acknowledge

that. As the world currently stands, our lives and livelihoods are still subsidized by colonial violence. So, we have it as a long-term horizon, but we don't want to claim that we are doing it already because this work is very difficult, and it takes a long time. Next.

So one of the things that I do in my work is in addition to offering the general critique of colonialism in higher education and beyond, is actually mapping these ditches that happen when we actually commit to social and institutional change, but we end up circularly reproducing colonial patterns in the work. So, I try to map these ditches so that we can be intellectually conscious of them, and then pedagogically ask what kind of practices and pedagogues can move us when we get stuck in these places? Next.

So, this work also integrates different dimensions of decolonizing work. Often, when we talk about decolonization and [AUDIO OUT], we only emphasize the intellectual layer of this work. And, of course, that's extremely important, but what I find in my research is that if we don't attend to the affective and relational layers of this work, then we tend to get stuck in those ditches that I mentioned before. So, in order to actually confront the fact that this work is difficult, it is uncomfortable, it is even painful sometimes, then we need to have all of these layers at work. And, of course, attending as well to our political, economic, and ecological accountability's. Next.

So my warning for the presentation is that it may annoy you, and I say that because even when we have a really strong personal and political commitment to decolonization, where we start talking about complexities and complexities in this work and we start seeing ourselves in colonial patterns, it can raise our sort of hackles up and make us defensive, or want to deflect, or various other affective responses that relate to the fact, as I said, that this work, if we're doing it right, if we're actually taking it seriously, does really challenge us in our ways of knowing, being, and relating. So that's my pedagogical warning. So more on the discomfort, difficulties, and pain of decolonizing work. Next.

So, I really like this quote. There was a review of this recent spate of books about whiteness, and racism, and how to be an anti-racist in the Boston Review. And the author of the review had this great opening line of there's a long condition of White people thinking they can read their way out of trouble. And that relates to my earlier comment that often in higher education, we are emphasizing if we only read this book, if we only added this to our syllabus, then we would know how to end racism. And, of course, it's not that simple. Next.

So as I said before, if we don't clear the kind of affective space, the kind of on the of White people, for instance, the fragility's, the projections, the perceived entitlements that tend to make junk in our metaphorical addicts, and if we don't clear the relational space to number one address the fact that we have these very unequal broken relationships that are not

accountable, or based on trust, trust or consent, or reciprocity, then the intellectual critiques, they might land in a superficial way, but they're not going to land in a way that actually invites us to rethink our research and our practice. Next.

So, the idea of this approach to decolonizing work that emphasizes the affective in the relational layers is that we need to learn to sit with and hold what is difficult, uncomfortable, and painful. So, developing the stamina, which is in my title, to actually do this work even when it's uncomfortable without becoming overwhelmed, or annoyed, and wanting to just give up. Next.

There's also learning to sit with what we can't understand or don't know, which is another way of re-framing this emphasis on if we just had more knowledge about racism or whiteness, we can solve this. So, part of it is saying, you know, I don't always understand the experiences of people who are in different personalities than me and that's OK. And I don't understand other knowledge systems and that's OK. I can still respect them, and I can try to develop the sensibilities and sensitivities to be accountable even when I don't understand. Next.

So then, again, it's learning to detect, for White people such as myself, the ways that racial and colonial violence aren't always visible to us because we have this very comfortable system for our bodies that doesn't invite us to question the ways that we might be reproducing harm even in unconscious or subtle ways. So, part of this work is developing the radars to sense how you're being read by someone else, especially someone else in a different positionality than yourself. And also, to denaturalize the way that you're reading the world so that we can start to sense what is being invisibilised so that we can then address it. Next.

So, there's also the difficulty of doing this work together, and by that I mean the work that is needed for decolonisation is very different in terms of what White people need to do versus what indigenous and racialized people need to do. And there's a lot of work that we need to do together as well, but there's some conversations that need to happen that is probably best done in parent [AUDIO OUT]. So, for instance, for White people to sit with and work through their perceived exceptionalism, for them to work through their fragility's, for them to work through their White guilt, that needs to happen, but it can re-traumatize racialized and indigenous people if we do it in one big group because then they're hearing, again, the ways that white people don't get it, the ways that we're reproducing harm.

Conversely, indigenous and racialized people need spaces where they can talk through their frustration in this work, especially their frustration with their White colleagues. And if White people are present to listen to that, it can feel unsafe because you don't know how those critiques are going to be weaponized against you. So there's also the need to interrupt the de-universalization. What I mean is that we need to do different work, which makes a

presentation like this actually quite difficult because I'm probably speaking to a mixed group of people. And I present this humbly, knowing that it might not land in the same way for all people.

So then there's this need to interrupt the desire to be absolved without giving anything up. And this often happens on the part of White people doing this [AUDIO OUT] tend to say, I will make changes to our decolonization, but only up to the point where I feel comfortable. And we still want to have control over the way that changed looks and the way that it moves, and we're not actually giving up our perceived authority or entitlement to determine the way forward.

And, of course, people generally want an end point or a checklist of this work. They want to be able to figure out how to decolonize their course in one three-hour anti-racist session. And as I said at the beginning, this is long-term work. There are lots of ups and downs. There are many failures that happen in the process, along with the successes. And I'm inviting us to shift our focus not to, did I do the 10 things I need to do to decolonize. But rather, can I invest in the integrity of this process with all of its pains, difficulties, and its joys? Next.

So then related to this fact that this is an up and down process, there's a need to hold two things in tension. One of this is respecting the pace of learning, and that's the pace of our own learning, the pace of our colleagues learning, the pace of our students learning because it's very difficult to rush this work. But at the same time, we are still accountable to those who are being affected by our slow learning. So how do we respect the pace while also understanding that it's affecting other people and we remain responsible for that at the same time? Next.

So overall, I think in order to do this work with stamina, with integrity, we have to be able to sit with the fact that it comes with paradoxes, complexities, complicity's, uncertainties, and the kinds of questions and difficult conversations that people generally avoid, and being able to sit with this can be called negative capability. So as opposed to adding more information or adding more skills, which is positive capability, about learning to hold space for all of these difficult things, and confront them, and move without having a premade plan. Next.

So, and one more click, I think. So here, I wanted to just emphasize. As I mentioned at the beginning, there's so many different ways of conceptualizing and approaching decolonization. And we probably all have one preference more than others, and our institutions probably have a tendency towards one more than others. So, I'm just going to review those really quickly here in case this framework is useful for you in conceptualizing where different people are at.

So the first is called regressive reform, and by that, I mean people who actually frame decolonization as a threat to institutional values and are actively working to stand in the way

of or even reverse decolonization efforts in our institutions in an effort to protect existing privileges. Then there are those who don't necessarily want to reverse what's happening, but they really don't see a need for change, the no reform approach. And they don't really see decolonization as desirable, and they may not even understand really what it's asking of them. [AUDIO OUT] implications for [AUDIO OUT] apart from lack of doing anything.

Then there is what I call minor reforms. So, this is really approaching decolonization as diversification. So it's increased inclusion in existing institutions, giving more access to the promised benefits of the institution, and really, for instance, transforming institutional policies to provide more resources to indigenous students and faculty, to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and capital that they would need to excel according to existing institutional standards. So, it's not so much transforming the institution, as transforming diverse people quote unquote "In order to fit within the existing institution."

So, the more radical reform would say, OK, no, we actually need a deeper transformation of our institutions. We need recognition. We need more representation. We need redistribution. And even redress, for instance, in relation to institutional complicity in slavery and colonization. So, the implications for practice here would be to centre, empower, marginalize communities and their perspectives. Ensure more equitable resource distribution in consideration of systemic, historical, and ongoing marginalization.

And then, finally, the beyond reform approach says, you know what? This institution is so deeply colonial that we may or may not ever be able to decolonize it, and if we were to, it would probably require the end of higher education as we know it. So, what is the implication there? Well, the idea is that, yes, in the immediate term, we try to mitigate their harm, we redistribute resources, create spaces for colonial work in the way that the radical reform approach does.

But in the long-term, there's also this question of how do we mobilize possibilities beyond what is currently imaginable within our existing institutions? And whether that is creating alternative institutions or learning and thinking with other educational possibilities that are not confined to the institution, this is where this approach sort of gestures.

So, my invitation-- and I'm happy to share the slides after this, by the way, because I know I'm kind of going through them quickly. --is to think through a series of questions. And, Miriam, you can just click a couple of times because there's a lot there.

So, one would be to think about the assumption in investments and desires that are behind each of these approaches, and where these come from, and also where they lead. The other is, what does each of these approaches have to bracket or ignore in order to be internally

coherent? And then, for ourselves, you can ask where am I located on this map most of the time? Because I think we probably move around depending on our context.

And where would I like to be? Similarly, where is my institution or my department, and where would I like it to be? And what would be some of the barriers or challenges to actually shifting these things.

So, a map like this is meant to help us understand the landscape of decolonization, and also how to strategically navigate it. So, for instance, in my institution, if I'm going to a meeting about creating the international education strategy, which I have been, if I bring in the beyond reform critique, it's totally illegible to most people in that room. And most of the conversations there are either no reform or minor reform.

So, what I can do in that space to push us further is raise some sort of radical reform questions. And it may not be exactly where I want it to be, but it keeps us from getting stuck. And it's very contextual in terms of what may be possible and what might move things, and you have to be able to take [AUDIO OUT] back so that you can assess what's possible in a space and what's not and take a step back from yourself as well, which is, I might want to see something, but the gap between the here and there is so large that what I need to do is work with what's there and see what's possible.

OK, I think there might be one more question. Right, so one question is how do we have conversations across these different approaches without our relationships falling apart or without sowing discord in our departments or in other contexts? And, of course, some discord might be generative to work with, but some starts to break.

So how do we figure out how to navigate between these? And one of them may be actually putting a map like this on the table to say, you know, we all think we're talking about the same thing when we talk about decolonization, but actually, we're coming from very different places. OK, Next slide.

This is just sort of trying to visually represent the fact that the ups and downs that I mentioned before. Often, when we start decolonization work, we get very excited. Something has inspired us to be a part of this work, and we want it to be successful. We want to move forward, move on, make change, and we often get that at least immediate sense that we're doing something important, and that we are securing some kind of different future, and that we can have solutions that might actually come in a checkbox or in 50 ways to decolonize your institution.

So that can be an initial charge from this, but then what often happens is that once we start to encounter the complexities, the paradoxes, the tensions, and the conflicts of this work, we get really down, it's disappointing, we get disillusioned, it feels like there's no hope, why do we even bother? So, the invitation that I'm offering is, again, for us to figure out how to develop the stamina for the long haul of this work.

And as I said, there will be these ups and downs, but if we understand the complexities, uncertainties, and tensions are part of this work, then we may not fall as deeply into the rut when things don't quite go our way. And we need to find ways to sustain this work so that we have vitality to commit to it in the long haul, and we can be comfortable with uncertainty, and we can have patience with ourselves and others, and be dexterous in the kind of strategic moves that we make. So next.

I think maybe we can just click through these, and, again, I'll send the slides. These are just common patterns that tend to emerge when we're doing decolonizing work, especially, again, for White people like myself, where we say we're intellectually committed and politically committed to this work, but in reality, our behaviours suggest something else. So here, I've mapped some of these circular patterns, and, again, I'll send this to you all. But one thing I have to say is that describing and critiquing these patterns is not enough to interrupt them. It might be a necessary precondition that we have to kind of know what the patterns are, but, again, intellectually knowing and then effectively in relation to shifting as a different thing.

So, my question is always, what can actually move us to break these patterns so that we can grow up and show up differently to decolonizing work? Doing what needs to be done and what we can do, rather than what we want to do.

So, the last thing I have to share with you all is actually a poem [AUDIO OUT] is efforts to try and effectively unsettle us from these patterns. And it was developed by the gesturing towards decolonial future collective out of a frustration of the fact that racialized indigenous people are so often expected to carry the weight of change and decolonization on their shoulders. Whereas, for White people, we might come in and out of this work, but it's always optional for us, and we're always expecting, whether it's conscious or not, racialized and indigenous people to show us, or tell us, do it in a kind way that's not too critical, that doesn't make us feel too bad. So, the idea with the poem that I'm going to read excerpts from is the position of someone racialized or indigenous saying, especially to their White colleagues and peers, this is why I can't do the work anymore. So, the next slide.

And so, again, I have to reemphasize that it's impossible to create universal resources, and this text is focused on effectively mostly White readers. So, for those of you who are not,

maybe there's something that nonetheless resonates for you and your experience in this work.

So, as you'll listen to the excerpts from the poem, I have a few invitations. One, is to observe your own intellectual and affective responses, and try not to dismiss them or repress them, except that they're coming. And you don't [AUDIO OUT] because some of them might be problematic, but just notice that they're there, so that we can start being honest about what's going on inside us. To ask them where these responses are coming from or what might be behind them, including the fears, insecurities, and desires that could be behind them. And how could these fears and insecurities actually be preventing other possibilities for decolonizing work?

And then I have, at the end of the excerpts, a few follow up questions or invitations for you to think with. So, I'm going to read the excerpt from the poem now. When I send the PowerPoint, you'll have the link to the full home if you want to engage. So next.

OK, so why I can't hold space for you anymore. Do you really want to know why I can't hold space for you anymore? Because I have held space for you before, and every time, the same things happen. You take up all the space, and expect me to use my time, energy, and emotion in service of fulfilling your desires, to validate you as someone who is good and innocent, to be the appreciative audience for your self-expression, to perform my trauma, to centre your feelings, to absolve you from guilt, to filter what I say so that I don't make you uncomfortable. And you don't even realize that you're doing it. Next.

Because your support is always conditional on whether it aligns with your agenda, on whether it's requested in a gentle way, on whether I perform a politics [AUDIO OUT] for you, on whether it fits your personal brand, on whether it contributes to your legacy, whether you'll get rewarded for doing it, on whether it feels good or makes you look good, or it gives you the sense that we're moving forward. Next.

Because when you give me space to speak, it always comes with strings attached about what I can and cannot say and how I can say it. And even when I say what I want to say anyway, you'll read me as ungrateful, incompetent, unreliable, and betraying your confidence.

You complain behind my back that I'm creating a hostile environment. You say I'm being unprofessional, emotional, and oversensitive. That I need to get over it. That I'm blocking progress. That I shouldn't be so angry. That not everything is about colonialism, or racism, or whiteness. That aren't we all just people in the end? That you have a racialized friend, colleague, or girlfriend that really likes you. Next.



Because you minimize and further invisibilize my pain. You're learning yourself actualisation, your credibility, your security, and your social mobility always come at my expense, and that's why I can't hold space for you anymore. Next.

So that was just part of the poem, but I have a few follow up invitations, and, again, these are sort of targeted for White participants. But the questions or the things that we asked people to consider when we present this poem is to think about the costs of these patterns in the long run for the wellbeing of racialized and indigenous people who are experiencing this. And also, for the possibility for death and sustainability in the relationships that we're building together.

Also, to consider what you would need to unlearn in order to enable healthier and more generative relationships between different communities. How we might be expecting racialized and indigenous colleagues to hold space for our learning, and have patience with our inevitable mistakes, and just assuming that they're happy to do it. How this place is then a demand on indigenous people's time and labour in ways that also are not generally acknowledged or recognized by the institution, for instance, when it comes to tenure and promotion, and requires them to relive painful and traumatic experiences and frustrations over and over again. And then, how the labour that's expected of indigenous marginalized people could be better acknowledged, rewarded, and better get redistributed in our institutional context so that we're actually sharing equitably the labour of institutional and social change.

So, again, you'll get this power point, and I have some additional resources here in the vein of what I've just presented of trying to move people effectively and relationally in this work, beyond the intellectual. I would say especially the last one. If you leave this session feeling a bit tense, if you go and listen to the radical tenderness or read the radical tenderness manifesto, then it could help calm some things and make it feel like this work is actually possible, even though it's difficult.

So, I think the last slide is next, and that's just my information. And thank you very much. Thank you, Miriam, for being my PowerPoint assistant and--