



## A Look At Jane Hill's Wife

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decolonisation is the key to equality

**[Photos] Take A Look At Jane Hill's Wife**

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Equality in higher education has become a hot topic in recent years and there have been many ongoing discussions being made around it. After the revelation of some shocking reports about the experiences of minorities at universities, there is an increasing concern that minority students and academics are being disadvantaged in higher education. For instance, the latest statistics showed that Black students are 50% more likely to drop out of university compared to other students and the main factor contributing to the low retention rate was Black students' lack of cultural connection with the curriculum, other students, and academic staff. Some other examples of inequality at universities include experiencing discrimination because of religion, women being disadvantaged in science publishing, or racial minorities not being hired for senior academic positions.

With all these reports and statistics being revealed, lots of efforts have been made to tackle the inequality problem in higher education. For example, a pilot project was run at the LSE by students and academics in collaboration to diversify the curriculum in terms of gender and race. Similar attempts have been made at other universities (e.g. UCL) aiming to address the issues related to diversity and equality; however, decolonisation has been a concept that is largely neglected in equality talks. Thus, seeking to identify the best way to tackle inequality at universities, in this blog post, I will attempt to distinguish decolonisation from diversity and present it as the main condition for achieving equality in higher education. In doing so, I will give examples by building on my own experience and those around me who play active roles in different universities as minority students, researchers, and/or teachers.

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### Drawing a distinction between diversity and decolonisation

Diversity means acknowledging differences between individuals or groups of people and recognising their differences as positive values. It is often used as a tool to build equality through the inclusion of those 'others' who are different from 'ordinary'. In that sense, what is presented as *diverse* would usually be seen as *not the ordinary*. The problematic issue here is that accepting this logic implies that there are certain standards that determine *the ordinary*. Since differences between individuals have been largely ignored throughout the history and this resulted in certain groups of individuals (such as elite white men) creating the so-called 'standards', the characteristics of *the ordinary* basically pertain to the characteristics of these *privileged* ones.

On the other hand, decolonisation -in general sense- is defined as "the action or a process of a state withdrawing from a former colony, leaving it independent"; yet, it is a long political process as is the colonisation itself. In order to decolonise, individuals should reject their internalised norms and taboos that are the products of colonialism and this of course cannot be expected to happen all at once. People need to engage with their past, present, and future holding a perspective that is distinguished from the prevailing dominant perspectives. Ultimately, decolonising mind and knowledge is the first step of decolonising everything else. Thus, not thinking based on the rules of the hegemonic system or critiquing the existing means of colonialist thinking appears to be the fundamental phase of truly achieving equality.

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## Diversifying versus decolonising universities

It is nowadays a common trend to include a diversity statement at the end of academic job descriptions that are being advertised. It is usually something like this: “We actively encourage diversity and inclusion, while opposing all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.” This is a huge improvement, encouraging minorities to apply for the aforementioned jobs, who would otherwise probably just think that they would not be hired because of not being the *typical* candidate. Nevertheless, however welcoming this statement is, the job descriptions still do not provide minorities with equal opportunities because they force minorities to fit in certain categories formed by the standards of *the typical*. Therefore, minorities who get these jobs are often the ones who go by the book and do not engage with their so-called differences in their academic work and identity.

More specifically, minority academics do not have a chance to represent their cultural values and perspectives in their career because of their differences being perceived as *not typical* or different than the so-called standards of academia. Even if they do, their scientific objectivity as well as academic qualities and products start to get questioned. To illustrate, when a white man investigates the representations of Muslims with headscarf in the media, this is perceived as normal and is well-credited whereas if a Muslim woman with headscarf examines the same topic, her findings become discredited and seen as subjective because of her cultural connection with the subject. Not surprisingly, this critique does not emerge when privileged academics study topics with which they have personal connections, such as when a European academic researching human right violations in Europe. These and many similar scenarios point out that the main challenge faced by disadvantaged academics and students is not just about them existing in higher-education settings as it relates to diversity, it is rather about how much they can truly reflect themselves in such settings.

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Diversity reinforces the existing unjust system, decolonisation challenges it. Diversity authorises the advantaged, decolonisation empowers the underrepresented and undervalued. Diversity seeks to include people, decolonisation seeks to rehabilitate them. Diversity is for the mainstream, decolonisation is against the mainstream. All in all, however, none of these are to say that diversity is a horrible thing, it is rather to underscore that diversity without decolonisation is not enough to bring equality and fairness into higher education.



## En route to equality in higher education

Academia and academic knowledge are shaped by power relations. In an ideally equal higher-education setting, knowledge cannot and should not come from a certain group of people more so than others. Decolonisation is what universities need first. Diversity can only really happen when everyone is equal; therefore, diversifying universities without acknowledging unequal power relations cannot bring equality.

*“Coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breath coloniality all the time and everyday.” – Nelson Maldonado-Torres*

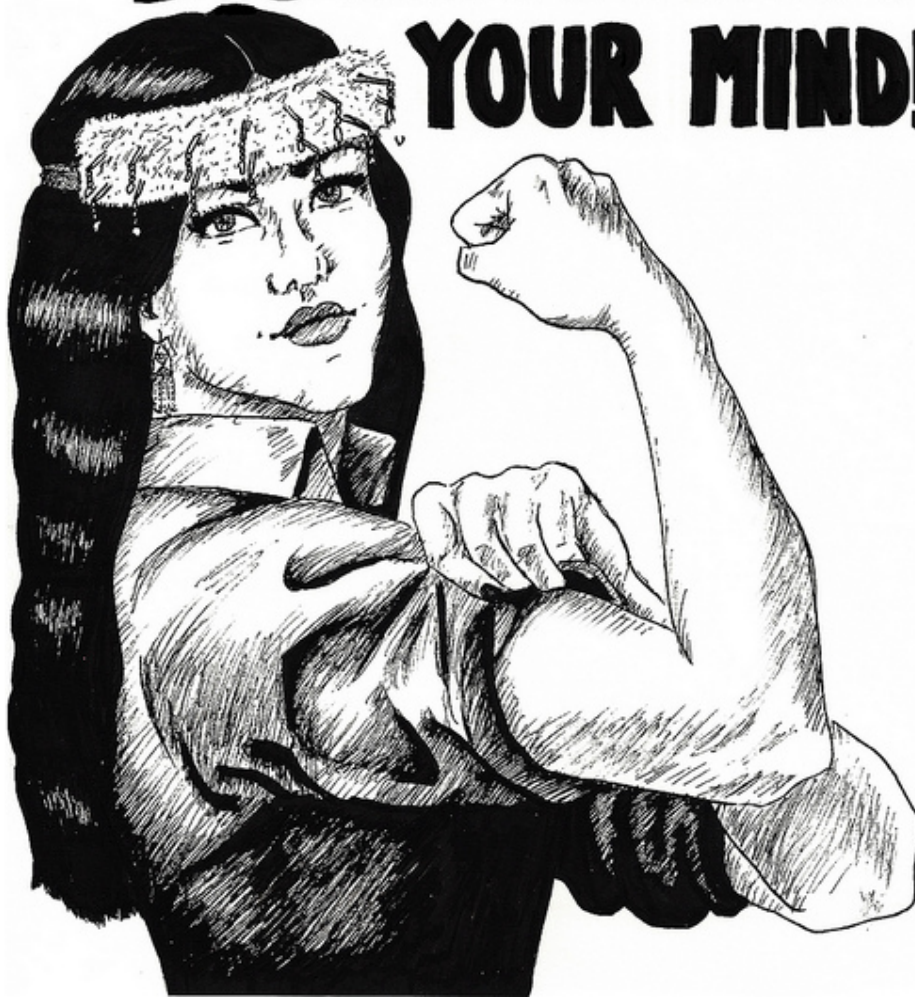
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Colonial thoughts are deeply internalised both inside and outside higher education and so, decolonising knowledge can be a very long and hard process. Many academics might resist it, some students may even find this topic sensitive to learn; however, small, gradual, and continuous steps (such as not considering different methods of investigation non-scientific even if they have the same qualities with scientific methods) can help to decolonise the minds of the future, if not today. In the end, if we can manage to achieve equality at universities, we can be more optimistic for a future that have fairer societies.



# Decolonize YOUR MIND!



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