Article

Unsettling information literacy: Exploring critical approaches with academic researchers for decolonising the university

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Abstract

In the past seven years, student-led decolonisation movements have taken root in UK universities. Decolonising the university is an intellectual project, asking critical questions about the content of curricula, disciplinary canons and pedagogical approaches. It is simultaneously a material one, challenging the colonial legacies that manifest in institutional spaces, cultures and financial decisions, students' experience and staff labour conditions (Cotton, 2018, p. 24). Academic libraries have recognised their role in addressing how 'coloniality survives colonialism' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243), in particular through the diversification of collections and resources. However, libraries have neglected to interrogate their educational potential for decolonisation, specifically in exercising information literacy (IL) teaching and approaches.

This qualitative research examines IL through a decolonial lens with an eye to both its colonial attributes and its potential for decolonising the curriculum. Interviews with five academic researchers are used to explore the potential for critical information literacy (CIL) in decolonial work and ask what IL might look like from a decolonial perspective. The findings of the interviews are structured according to Icaza and Vázquez's framework of three core processes for decolonising the university; they reveal that CIL might usefully facilitate positionality, practice relationality and consider transitionality. In turn, these findings lead to a set of recommendations for unsettling IL and generating the potential for decolonisation. The relationship between CIL and decolonising the curriculum is as yet unexplored and academics' engagement with and opinions on CIL have rarely been examined. This research therefore offers some novel contributions for IL practitioners and researchers in relation to both teaching/ learning and research. It also contributes some points of departure for a more a powerful and holistic decolonial pedagogy in the university. A more fitting approach than traditional IL, critical information literacy can become a key part of scaffolding a decolonising approach to learners' navigation of information and processes of knowing.

Keywords

academic staff; critical information literacy; decolonisation; decolonising the curriculum; higher education; information literacy; librarian-faculty collaboration; UK

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1. Introduction

In 2017, the writer, poet and educator, Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan was studying at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies), University of London and dismayed at the lost potential

for a course on postcolonial theory and practice to work from a decolonial viewpoint. She and three friends updated and restructured the syllabus with their own "decolonised" version.

> What if more than adding lesser-known authors with longer names but still palatably well-written English, we questioned the idea of authorship and "sources" themselves? … What if we validated forms of knowledge which fell outside of traditional archives and weren't textual? What if we gave credence to rumour in the barbershop as much as we do to information found in libraries that require identity cards? What if we sat in the classroom but fundamentally asked ourselves to distrust it, and ourselves? (Manzoor-Khan, 2017b)

In these reflections on the process, Manzoor-Khan (2017b) summons the library as a key site in decolonising the curriculum, in particular provoking our approaches to information literacy (IL), which has traditionally been understood as finding, using and evaluating information. Manzoor-Khan, however, begins to unsettle our understanding of where we find information, how we evaluate it and for what purposes we use it.

Critical information literacy (CIL) is an alternative approach that situates itself in relation to and as a criticism of the work of traditional IL (Critten, 2016). I suggest that CIL, with its deeper scrutiny of power structures and socio-political dynamics of information and student learning, has particularly valuable features for exposing coloniality and working with students as co-creators of knowledge (Freire, 1996).

This research examines IL through a decolonial lens with an eye to both its colonial attributes and its potential for decolonising the curriculum. Recognising the pivotal role that academics play in the way information is produced, used, circulated and woven into course design, the study works with five academic researchers to explore the potential for CIL in decolonial work and ask what IL might look like from a decolonial perspective. The relationship between CIL and decolonising the curriculum is as yet unexplored; insights gained from this research can encourage librarians to integrate decolonial considerations into their IL praxis on the one hand and, on the other, to include IL in their work with students and academics that endeavours to decolonise the curriculum.

Embarking on this research, I am aware of what I have to gain from it and my position as a white woman working and studying at elite and archaic institutions, especially in light of the way white women have historically been agents of libraries' racial, missionary and civilizing projects: a legacy of doing the coloniser's work that can also be located in contemporary practices (Schlesselman-Tarango, 2016). Nevertheless, I believe that it is not solely the work of people of colour to interrogate and critique library practices or shoulder the burden of reimagining, restructuring and reorienting them for decolonial ambitions.

Decolonisation is understood in this article beyond the sense of a singular moment of formal political independence from colonial power. It considers the ways that legacies of colonialism prevail and are perpetuated in hierarchies of power and knowledge in the university and thus understands the library and IL as key sites of coloniality. Moreover, I try to keep in mind the transformative potential of decolonising work, the deep-rooted injustices it aims to address but also the ultimate impossibility of decolonisation. There are inevitable tensions in the study since both IL and decolonisation have been critiqued for their co-option into neoliberal motives; their suggested partnership should not be engaged as 'a viable subject for the entrepreneurial academic agenda' (Sisters of Resistance, Left of Brown & Rodriguez, 2018) or for librarians to

virtue signal, further legitimise IL in higher education (HE) or otherwise 'demonstrate the library's value within the university's globalizing agenda' (Nicholson, 2018, p. 4).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Decolonisation

Decolonising the curriculum has secured purchase in UK universities as a powerful call to action to 'transform the terms upon which the university (and education more broadly) exists, the purpose of the knowledge it imparts and produces, and its pedagogical operations' (Bhambra et al., 2018, p. 1). It is an intellectual project, asking critical questions about the content of curricula, disciplinary canons and pedagogical approaches. It is simultaneously a material one, challenging the colonial legacies that manifest in institutional spaces, cultures and financial decisions, students' experience and staff labour conditions (Cotton, 2018, p. 24). In the past seven years, students have challenged the whiteness of academia, imperial legacies, colonial iconography, Eurocentric curricula, and the epistemological authority of Western knowledge (HSPS graduates and students, 2018; Manzoor-Khan, 2017a; Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford, n.d.; The Rhodes Must Fall Movement, 2015; "Why is my Curriculum White?" collective, 2015). Although decolonisation in academia has been criticised as 'settler harm reduction' (Tuck & Yang, 2012) and critiqued as a 'bandwagon' (Moosavi, 2020), Western universities are key sites where 'colonial knowledge is consecrated, institutionalised and naturalised' (Bhambra et al., 2018) and empire has always drawn power from cultural practice (Hudson, 2016). Decolonisation is thus very much the concern of libraries, for whom the production and circulation of texts, narratives, languages and knowledge is their essence.

While decolonisation and libraries are demonstrably connected, the published literature on their relationship is limited and IL is often overlooked from consideration. Neither Charles (2019) nor Crilly (2019) name IL itself when exploring the library's role in decolonisation, though both effectively communicate the importance of our teaching practices and unique interactions with learners. The publication of Narrative Expansions (Crilly & Everitt) in 2022 offers a welcome gathering of perspectives on decolonial library practice and theory, with reflections on CIL (Pashia, 2022) and mention of Indigenous IL (Chong & Edwards, 2022). Nevertheless, practices, projects and ideas have still overwhelmingly focused on the diversification of library collections (Elliott & Piker, 2020; Sharman, 2020), critiquing teaching collections through computational analysis (Price et al., 2021), and diversification of reading lists (Crilly & Panesar, 2020; Field & Mires Richards, 2019; Wilson, 2020). But as Hudson elaborates, 'the presence of [underrepresented] works in a library does not ensure their agency, epistemologically speaking, in "the scholarly and cultural record" per se' (2017b, p. 12). There is productive space for exploring IL in academic libraries' decolonisation agendas to convert the problematic "presence alone" approach.

2.2 Coloniality of information literacy

No single study has explored IL in relation to decolonisation, but the literature does allude to its coloniality, especially in the strong tradition of IL research that critiques skills-based and behavioural approaches.

The coloniality of IL has been deconstructed in an educational context by Watkins who teaches Indigenous ways of knowing as authoritative, arguing that when we only use exclusive, Western indicators like peer review, academic qualifications and scholarly publications, 'we are complicit in perpetuating a hegemonic concept of authority that only recognizes … one system of

knowledge' (2017, p. 13). Young also addresses the lingering coloniality in IL teaching when discussing the imperial history of library assessment, drawing parallels between British imperial information systems and libraries' methods of assessment, with their inclination towards quantitative measurements, surveillance practices and institutional strategic planning (2020).

The coloniality of IL has also been noted at the policy level. Pilerot and Lindberg's discourse analysis of international IL policy texts warns that exporting Western IL models focused on textual information sources that do not allow for situated or contingent understandings of IL risk 'turning into an imperialistic project' (2011, p. 338). Hudson, meanwhile, criticises how majority world peoples' lack of IL skills, implying low intellectual capacity, is widely cited in Library and Information Studies (LIS) and information inequality research, without any analysis of the peculiarity of otherwise universalised Western information systems (2016, p. 72).

Moreover, the coloniality of IL is revealed in critiques of the Western knowledge focus of its theorisation. Lloyd exposes IL's alignment with the 'pejoratives of western educational practices (ie an economic rationalist perspective with an emphasis on print cultures and textual practices), which focus on abstract and immaterial representations of coming to know' (2005, p. 83). Such ideas are developed by Hicks and Lloyd who argue that culturally specific models of IL marginalise alternative forms of knowledge including cultural and social practices that learners bring with them and which support literacy in transitioning to new cultural contexts and intercultural settings (2016).

These critical perspectives provide a useful starting point for thinking about how IL might need to change to play a role in decolonising the curriculum; by rejecting normative approaches and hierarchies which actively marginalise diverse information practices.

2.3 Critical information literacy and decolonisation

CIL's scrutiny of information power structures suggests it to be a more promising accomplice for libraries' decolonising agendas. The literature, however, reveals reservations about its suitability. A decade on from publication, the formative text, Critical Library Instruction (Accardi et al., 2010) has been criticised for 'fail[ing] to address matters of race and racism' (Accardi et al., 2020, p. 2), meaning librarians have looked elsewhere for frameworks, pedagogies and theories to inform their praxis (Leung & López-McKnight, 2020). Tewell's thorough literature review highlights CIL's important decolonial elements such as emboldening learners' agency in the educational process and its stance that information is inherently political (2015). But it does not include any discussion of the capacity for CIL to work against colonialism or racism, in an equivalent way to which the review highlights CIL's power in a neoliberal context. Given the way colonialism and capitalism are uniquely intertwined, this feels like an omission from the literature. For it to be seriously included in academic libraries' undertakings to decolonise the curriculum, CIL must reckon more directly with issues of race, white supremacy and colonialism.

Nonetheless, there is a small but inspiring selection of practice-based LIS literature that draws on critical theories of IL to engage in key aspects of decolonisation. Freire's critical pedagogy and Elmborg's critical questioning are foundational elements of CIL which Brook, Ellenwood and Lazzaro advocate for in anti-racist reference work; librarians should be politically "bound up" with users' struggles against racism through their assistance with research' (2015, p. 274). Pashia and Rapchak's work stands out for explicitly recommending CIL for librarians to explore structural racism in information production, dissemination and organisation (Pashia, 2017), and engage in anti-racist IL (Rapchak, 2019). Keer and Bussman, meanwhile, make a case for critical information ethics as an alternative to mainstream IL which, they argue, reproduces

Eurocentrism and coloniality through 'capitalist notions of information as a commodity' and treating students as consumers (2019, p. 1); these are both familiar elements of CIL's concern with neoliberalism but here the connection is drawn to colonialism and thus decolonisation. Some of the literature also develops CIL's concern for learner agency to explicitly centre race in interactions and produce anti-racist, inclusive and decolonial IL teaching practices. Morrison, for example, turns to asset-based pedagogies for developing a culturally relevant education that foregrounds racial contexts in her IL classroom to engage marginalised students and interrupt deficit educational concepts (2017). Hughes also condemns deficit models of engaging with students, reporting how 'Black students often describe feeling nervous to ask for help even from me for fear of looking or sounding stupid' (2020, p. [2]). This echoes Bruce's argument that 'because of the overt power structures students navigate throughout their academic experience, students of color may be guarded or even less likely to seek assistance from librarians' (2020). Navigating academia and its information environments has a significant racialised, emotional dimension.

Loyer goes further with a model of Indigenous IL that foregrounds care, kinship, reciprocity and assessing the effect of research on our lives: 'emotional, spiritual, and physical health must be factors in how we teach students about accessing information' (2018, p. 155). There are parallels with this North American context in the way that students working for the Cambridge Legacies of Slavery Inquiry, recognised the trauma of uncovering information on their academic institution's financial and intellectual links to slavery, asked for improved access to mental health support (Decolonising through Critical Librarianship, 2019). CIL is useful for highlighting systems of marginalisation but socio-cultural understandings that recognise the affective, material and emotional aspects of working with information and develop a framework of care are just as relevant.

2.4 Academics' engagement with critical information literacy

Recognising that academic researchers set the agenda for curricula, including reading list construction and student assessment, their engagement with and opinions on CIL is an important aspect of this research but one that has not yet been explored fully in the literature. The 'Information in the Curriculum' project (McCluskey Dean, n.d.) is rare in engaging academics in co-produced CIL praxis with ideas relevant to decolonising the curriculum. It suggests unpicking the role and value of a reading list and giving students the opportunity to co-construct a list by seeing them as experienced practitioners with valuable lived experiences. Non-textual sources on reading lists are also useful for addressing 'how the privileging of text may exclude valuable contributions' (McCluskey Dean, 2020). This collaborative approach embedded in a wider, more holistic IL intervention offers a particularly productive alternative to the narrow focus on diversifying lists.

3. Methods

3.1 Research method

This research utilises an interpretivist paradigm, which understands reality to be complex, context-bound and constructed by the individual. Assuming this social construction of reality, the study was designed using qualitative methodology and interviews were chosen as the most appropriate technique for gaining access to detailed descriptive and reflective data. Decolonisation is contested, complex, and an emergent topic in mainstream discussions about HE curricula, teaching and research practices. The nature of the data sought was 'too complicated to be asked and answered easily' (Pickard, 2017, p. 196). Thus interviews enabled

in-depth and detailed discussion, where knowledge gained was a result of the interaction between the researcher and participant; both 'changed' by the experience (Pickard, 2017).

3.2 Populations and sample

A purposive sampling method was used to gather participants (Table 1) that fit the criteria of the study, namely researchers employed in a teaching or research-focused academic role at a UK university, and, crucially, who have an interest in and understanding of decolonisation. Identification of initial participants was a matter of convenience, using contacts from my own engagement in decolonising work at a university and further participants were approached through a snowballing process, following the recommendations of existing participants (Morgan, 2012b). Since this research is interested in new insights resulting from highly contextualised instances of social reality, rather than accurate numeric results (Morgan, 2012a), the small sample size of five produced adequate data; I aimed for the research to be 'intensive, and thus persuasive at the conceptual level, rather than … extensive with intent to be convincing, at least in part, through enumeration' (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

Table 1: Participant information

	Position	**Subject**	**Institution**[1]
Participant A	Senior Lecturer	Law	Post-1992
Participant B	Professor	Geography	Russell Group
Participant C	Senior Lecturer	Geography	Post-1992
Participant D	Postdoctoral researcher	Geography	Russell Group
Participant E	Postdoctoral researcher	Geography	Russell Group

3.3 Ethics and data protection

Informed consent from all participants was ensured prior to the interview through advance distribution of an information sheet and providing opportunity for questions. Participants were assigned pseudonyms and all references to identifying names and institutions have been removed to preserve anonymity as far as possible. The interviews were conducted remotely using secure video-conferencing platforms at the respective homes of the interviewer and participant, providing privacy and comfort for both. The interview audio was recorded then transcribed by hand, and the data saved on a password-protected hard drive.

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[1] In 1992, the UK government's Further and Higher Education Act granted 35 polytechnics full university status, hence the "post-1992" designation. Two years later, many of the pre-1992 universities, which are 'characterised by higher levels of research activity, greater wealth, more academically successful and socioeconomically advantaged student intakes' formed the Russell Group of self-styled 'leading' universities (Boliver, 2015, p. 608). Until recently, Black British, British Pakistani, and British Bangladeshi students have been under-represented in these more academically selective universities, and are still less likely to be awarded a 'good degree' or complete their course compared to white students (Arday, Branchu & Boliver, 2022, p. 13). Meanwhile, sixty per cent of all Black students study at just thirty universities in the UK, and these institutions are often not respected, valued or promoted (Tatlow, 2015).

3.4 Data collection and analysis

Data collection took place within a three-week period in June 2020 and each interview lasted 58 minutes on average. The interviews were semi-structured with a guide (Appendix A) enabling space amongst the research questions for participants' own interests and spontaneous ideas (Brinkmann, 2012). Questions covered the participants' information practices, reflections on the coloniality of information and their own engagement with decolonisation. I asked a broad question about what decolonial information and information practices look like before inviting participants to reflect on whether they see a role for CIL in engaging students in decolonising ideas. Providing a rich definition of CIL (Appendix B) in advance enabled participants to pick out elements of a new concept that resonated with them.

I initially used an open coding process to uncover ideas and name concepts 'without concern for how they [would] ultimately be used' (Benaquisto, 2012). Line-by-line analysis and then a systematic but iterative grouping and synthesis of the codes was all done by hand, drawing out commonalities and key themes that resonated with the literature reviewed.

3.5 Theoretical framework

Icaza and Vázquez's framework of positionality, relationality and transition (2018) is used to organise the findings on CIL and decolonisation. Positionality means that knowledge, in particular the Eurocentric canon which assumes universal validity and a disembodied vantage point, is taught as situated. Relationality involves a transformation of the power relationships and exclusions in the classroom and across the university, whilst transitionality encourages students to question the meaning of the knowledge they learn. Developed through participatory Diversity Discussion Circles to understand colonial epistemic practices at the University of Amsterdam, the categories are a productive way to structure the findings which address information resources in learning and research, as well as how we work with students and envisage their university education.

3.6 Limitations and adaptations

The sample was limited in achieving maximum possible variation, with the majority of participants in the discipline of Geography, and one interesting exception in Law. Nevertheless, there was a wider spectrum of academic research level and institution type, and the methodology foregrounds the significance of multiple individual realities, allowing for heterogeneous accounts of information practices and perspectives on decolonisation.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted over remote video-conferencing platforms. Although the research design was not altered significantly, the medium made it harder for both interviewer and participants to read the richness of non-verbal cues, follow up on points and steer the conversation. I shared the interview guide with two participants in advance after one requested it, and another expressed hesitancy at the value of their participation, meaning I also clarified the sample criteria. This possibly influenced the participants' level of comfort and preparedness, though I ensured the interview still progressed as a conversation. The research model enabled this iterative process of methodological development to augment participants' engagement with the research through a reflexive understanding of their own value to the study and comprehension of the concept of CIL.

4. Findings

The interview participants were all deeply reflective and engaged in debates around decolonising the curriculum. They spoke about how their work had developed a decolonial focus, either from a long-standing history of applying postcolonial feminist and Critical Race theories, or through what might be termed a 'decolonial turn' in academia in the Global North (Moosavi, 2020, p. 334) with more mainstreamed discipline-based discussions on decolonisation taking place, especially in Geography (Esson et al., 2017). Many also reflected on their identity, personal background and positionality, declaring that they felt a responsibility to engage with decolonisation through the agency they have in their research.

In line with the literature, academic researchers treated the term "decolonise" with scepticism and understood decolonisation to be complex and contested: an ongoing process with no ultimate end result. Although participants were more comfortable talking in terms of knowledge and knowledge practices than information or information practices, the findings reveal several key themes with particular significance for IL and libraries' pedagogical approaches.

4.1 Positionality

According to Icaza and Vázquez's framework, positionality overcomes Eurocentricity and monocultural approaches to knowledge which assume a universal validity (2018). In practice in the university, positionality always teaches knowledge as situated, moves to more open forms of expertise and reveals the intersectional conditions of knowledge production. Many themes emerging in the findings suggest that IL can usefully facilitate positionality in both teaching and research contexts.

4.1.1 Reading lists
Although this research aimed to think beyond the issue of reading lists, it did emerge as a recurring and key theme. Centring marginalised voices in student reading lists and ensuring visibility in their own citations were seen to be important elements of academics' decolonial information practices. But it was apparent that the process of constructing and updating reading lists is no simple task. Participant C explained that they find it hard to cite Indigenous authors because 'there might be less or it might be harder to find' or English-language resources are unavailable.

The interviews also explored the material conditions in which more daring, decolonial or marginal readings can be introduced into teaching. Participant A explained that as a PhD student, 'your own research is a priority and are not thinking about how to make teaching critical or subversive, rather:

> You're just thinking: "This is what I've got to teach them, … I have to make sure they know what they need to know for their exam."

Moreover, the interviews also revealed a consideration of the labour involved in finding and reading diverse, optional literature for Black, Asian, minority ethnic, and other marginalised students who want to see their own experience and history reflected in their education.

It is clear from the interviews that these academics spend a lot of time and effort carefully thinking about how they can craft balanced and diverse reading lists to expose

students to information which will encourage a more holistic view of the world: facilitating positionality by challenging Eurocentricity and monocultural approaches to knowledge.

4.1.2 Non-traditional and non-textual information

The interviews revealed that academic researchers would be sensitive and open-minded to students purposefully and critically engaging with literature that does not reflect academic outputs in standard formats:

> Maybe [it is] a good thing to not just rely on what happens to get published in academic papers – [those] who can speak the language and employ the jargon. … if students go out and purposefully use other sources I think that would be amazing. (Participant C)

On the other hand, Participant A betrayed a concern that diversifying reading lists to include non-traditional sources such as blog posts would enable students to choose an 'easy option':

> What I am finding is that they tend to go for those sources and read a short blog post rather than reading a 20-page journal article.

CIL's attention to the 'complex power relationships that undergird all of information' (Downey, 2016, p. 42) might thus help teachers and learners alike to reflect on the multifaceted underlying contexts of our information activities:

- What does it mean that decolonising topics are found more often in non-academic formats?
- Why are they considered more accessible, and is this synonymous with being the 'easy option'?

Noting that they are already an educational practice peculiar to geographical disciplines, Participant E described the empowering value of field trips as an information source:

> Having that moment of sensation, being present on site, … having actual people-to-people interactions creates empathy, it creates other kinds of ways of relating to the subject, it conveys a sense of imminence that you just won't get from Google Scholar.

Social and embodied forms of information are here situated in opposition to the prevalent tool for finding textual, academic information. Presence, sensation, interaction, empathy and imminence correspond with social theories of IL that are often overlooked in academic contexts and could usefully be incorporated into libraries' decolonial approaches.

4.1.3 Destabilising

Sensation is also significant for destabilising learners' normative knowledge categories. Participant E hopes to create a 'productive tension' in teaching by juxtaposing different representations of knowledge, offering a cartographic example of a tactile wooden carving and paper-based map that give radically different representations of space:

> It's that sensation of difference … and then understanding that "oh, the categories that I thought are normative, the categories that I've been working with so far that I thought that's the normal, that's how things have always been" all of a sudden become uneasy, they become destabilised.

Participant C also gave an example of destabilising: importing non-English language words into new information, inspired by the 'disrupting' effect of hearing an Indigenous leader utilise Indigenous-language words and phrases in their political speeches. Moreover, citing the speech in an academic article:

> I've included all of the quotes in the original language and I've done the same for the theory that I use, which was written in German.

Drawing on the powerful speech-writing device to produce the same unsettling effect in the researcher's own piece has important ramifications for how that information functions; it draws attention to the non-English language context of the source information, centring those marginalised voices and both highlighting and inverting certain relationships of power. Rupturing standard English usage turns it into 'more than the oppressor's language' (hooks, 1994, p. 170). As hooks recommends, we should use that 'moment of not understanding what someone says as a space to learn … the opportunity to listen without "mastery," without owning or possessing speech through interpretation' (1994, p.172).

Both examples of destabilising our relationships with information in fact position the dominant knowledge practices, illustrating the contingency of knowledge and reminding the reader/listener of the 'geopolitical location of knowledge' (Icaza & Vázquez, 2018).

4.1.4 Gap-finding
Several participants indicated the practice of gap-finding was an important element of a decolonial IL in both teaching and research contexts.

Participant C described empowering students to critique and identify gaps in the information presented:

> I tried to include a few moments in that lecture where I just stopped and said: "What's missing here?" And I think that's sometimes one of the things we can do with students is not just impart information to learn but actually ask students to find the gaps almost or critique the information per se.

Participant B explained how they had embedded gap-finding and curricula critique into part of the final assessment for a course on Postcolonial and Decolonial Geography:

> It was set up for the student to decide which part of the Geography [course] they would wish to analyse with a postcolonial and/or decolonial perspective.

This pedagogical technique replicates and formalises the kind of analysis done by student activists who have noticed and drawn attention to the biases in and omissions from their curricula (HSPS graduates and students, 2018; Manzoor-Khan, 2017a). It also demonstrates where CIL could contribute to decolonisation; Participant C explained how the aim is not just gap-finding but 'questioning why certain marginalisations are the way that they are and tracing that backwards', thus offering a more productive method for librarians to engage in conversations about the power structures underlying information in reading lists.

In a research context, gaps were also a significant part of how academics interact with information. For Participant E, recognising the deficiencies in information sources which selectively ignore important perspectives is important:

> How do you write a history about the Vietnam war if you've never been to Vietnam, if you don't speak the language? How do you write a history of American-Soviet relations if you don't even speak Russian? … That's what we've done over the past 3-400 years, we've written these histories from London, from the archives of [named Western institutions]. But how can we really write this history if we forget or ignore half of the story?

Gap-finding can also be considered a positional practice: overcoming a monocultural approach to knowledge and exploring how 'axes of differentiation along race, class and gender have been essential for establishing the canon and, concurrently, how the canon has been essential to reproduce these axes of discrimination' (Icaza & Vázquez, 2018, p. 118).

4.1.5 Valuable information is situated

Participants responded positively to the definition of CIL and saw a role for it in decolonising the curriculum. In particular, this involved teaching about what we regard to be valuable information and recognising that all knowledge is situated:

> [Students] hopefully will pick up on this idea that all sources of knowledge about the world are situated and partial and influenced by these wider dynamics of coloniality. (Participant B)

Participant D reflected on how grammar, style and modes of writing are significant in how information is evaluated, alongside the peer review process as a key arbiter of value:

> If all you know is white American scholarship, all the suggestions that you make as a reviewer [are] going to reflect that … framework that you're familiar and comfortable with what you recognise as academic writing.

Watkins (2017) also critiqued Western markers of authority like peer review, but in Icaza and Vázquez's framework, simply drawing attention to the processes of information validation and authority removes their 'abstract and disembodied vantage point', thus positioning knowledge practices and enabling a move to more 'open forms of expertise' (2018, p. 119).

4.1.6 Colonial and decolonial contexts of information

Appreciating both the colonial and decolonial contexts of information is an important element of a decolonial CIL. Participant E spoke about their research experience with archival sources from a period of German history not categorised as 'colonial' because Germany did not yet exist as a nation state:

> The question of what's colonial and what's colonial knowledge … becomes about the categories we use. And … if you don't apply a critical lens it almost becomes impossible … I think that having that more comprehensive definition of information literacy is critical if we want to get at what we in History call the historicity of knowledge categories.

Understanding the context of how information is socially produced and influenced by power relations may be trickier due to the 'historicity of knowledge categories' but is significant for recognising the coloniality of information.

In a teaching context, Participant B discussed the workarounds used to situate an unfamiliar information source for students, in an effort to provide an equivalent level of context for the conditions of knowledge production and avoid reinforcing a sense of Indigenous peoples' difference:

> For a piece by an Indigenous person, I try and link to a Wikipedia page or a YouTube video where there's more background on the writer … so the students can look at that and understand what they're reading in light of that. (Participant B)

Mainstream sources from Wikipedia and YouTube, often treated warily by librarians, are here used to provide an 'endorsement' and position an unfamiliar context of information production. Participants also talked about the need for sensitivity about the context of decolonial knowledge and information:

> There are Indigenous testimonies that are still produced in a colonial setting. The term Indigenous in and of itself is still a very muddied, complex encounter usually, in which these knowledges emerge, and I think it's [about] foregrounding voices while at the same time being aware of contexts and [not] ascribing agency where agency didn't exist. (Participant E)

Participant B, moreover, was acutely aware of the way that information 'reflects coloniality in all sorts of ways'. Even sources originating directly from Latin American, Indigenous or Afro-Latin people can be oriented to Western mindsets, publication and circulation patterns, so:

> The challenge for me as a teacher and as a researcher is to try and think, how can I … generate information for the students or for myself in relation to the research that challenges those kinds of things? (Participant B)

Contextualising the coloniality and decoloniality of information helps to position and situate knowledge, including the dominant canonical texts which ordinarily assume an 'abstract position of universality, of objectivity' (Icaza & Vázquez, 2018).

4.1.7 Libraries as non-neutral interfaces for accessing information
The interviews surfaced observations on the library and its systems and technologies as non-neutral interfaces for finding information. For example, participant A discussed the terminology in the Westlaw database which reproduced imperial language of 'civility' and 'barbarous natives'.

Participant D encouraged the value of communicating to students that:

> Just because these five books are the most cited, are the first ones that pop up, are the ones that are at the front of the library shelf, that doesn't necessarily mean that you can stop there. There's a reason why they're the first five, there's a reason why they're positioned prominently in the library, there's a reason behind that and it's not just that they're the greatest five books on the topic.

They also addressed the implications of unacknowledged non-neutrality in libraries and archives:

> It raises a series of complicated methodological questions, once you understand how these colonial structures … inform how libraries work, and how you actually act upon it.

Positioning not just knowledge itself but the tools and technologies in libraries that we use to discover information might engender a deeper appreciation of the systemic privileging of closed, 'universally valid' forms of expertise (Icaza & Vázquez, 2018, p. 119). Critical approaches to library collections, classification structures and technologies are routine within CIL praxis, but as the literature indicated, it has not always been productively connected to colonialism and racism.

In sum, centring positionality in IL could undo the universalist standard of the West's information history and systems, and resist the erasure of non-Western ways of knowing the world (Hudson, 2016).

4.2 Relationality

The findings thus far have been concerned with content, curricula or information. Relationality is a category independent of these themes. It is concerned with transforming relationships in the classroom and across the university to enable dynamic forms of interaction and recognise diverse backgrounds as valuable (Icaza & Vázquez, 2018).

4.2.1 Critical pedagogies and horizontal student-teacher relationships

The category of relationality has much to do with practices of teaching. The interviews revealed an engagement from academic researchers with critical pedagogies, including Freire's approach to education:

> I suppose it depends on how you situate the students – are they purely in the end just banking this information or are they actually becoming … an agent in the process of decolonising themselves. (Participant B)

Although the comments were mixed, with Participant A saying it was an aspiration for the classroom when they were 'doe-eyed and idealistic', critical pedagogy could act as a point of interface between academics and librarians for developing critical information literacies in cross-institutional efforts to decolonise the curricula. Participant B advocated for 'making the classroom more of an exchange' because teachers and students have differing ideas about what they consider important in decolonising. Moreover, horizontal relationships were recognised as a significant element of how we can interact with information in a way that prepares the way for more decolonial information practices:

> The main challenge lies [in] breaking down some of those power dynamics between lecturer as teachers … actually saying we're learners together. (Participant C)

These reflections on the importance of more democratic forms of teaching echo Icaza and Vázquez's relational framework for decolonising the university that enable 'open and dynamic forms of interaction' (2018, p. 120).

4.2.2 Drawing on student experience

Students' own agency and capacity as information creators were also seen to be significant for decolonisation. Participant A spoke about using relatable examples in teaching and Participant C encourages students to draw on personal experience:

> What I have seen is students using their own knowledge, when they really critically reflect on where they come from and what kind of background they have and how that influences what they see or feel and experience. So that's something I'd like to see more of.

These comments reflect Icaza and Vázquez's relational approach where 'diverse backgrounds and the geo-historical positioning of the different participants in the classroom are rendered valuable in a dignified way' (2018, p. 120), and echo the work of various CIL practitioners, who exercise and build on Freire's pedagogies in their decolonising, asset-based and caring IL interventions (Brook et al., 2015; Hughes, 2020; Morrison, 2017).

4.3 Transitionality

Finally, Icaza and Vázquez use transitionality to foreground the significance of knowledge and learning; to decolonise, 'the university [needs] to actively address its own societal and ecological implications by enabling the students to bridge the epistemic border between the classroom and society' (2018, p. 120).

4.3.1 Success in academia

The significance of knowledge learned and created emerged in relation to the notion of success in both teaching and research. In the realm of research, participants reflected on their decisions about the language of writing and where they choose to publish; both have significant ramifications for decolonisation but are primarily influenced by neoliberal academic systems for success in academia:

> In order to reach as many people as possible, you would probably publish in English but then that is a colonial language and there will still be people who can't then be reached. (Participant C)

> I would love to publish in more marginal, for a lack of a better word, journals with less of an impact, but that [are] actually situated in the regions that I write about. Speaking perhaps to a broader audience in that way and having research appear alongside work that is not necessarily embedded as deeply as my work is in the Anglo-American tradition. As an early career researcher, that is just not a viable option. (Participant D)

It seems there is a careful balance between the broad audiences academics try to reach with their research and the implications this has for their career. A decolonial commitment to transitionality is here impeded by neoliberal market conditions of academia.

The data also surfaced tensions around the idea of student success and how it can be judged. On one hand, final exams and essay grades were perceived to be a constant concern for students:

> Even if I'm trying to be critical and radical and stuff, it does drive the students up the wall sometimes because they want to know how to do well on the assessment. (Participant A)

In the practice-based discipline of Law, with core components necessary to pass for qualifying, there might be serious implications to pursuing a decolonial approach, seen to be incompatible with official routes for success. On the other hand, box-ticking compliance and decolonial criticality are not always in competition:

> We try to reward … critical-thinking or so-called independent thinking, originality ... I've seen some amazing student work [and] that's the category in the marking matrix … they really show that they've gone above and beyond the minimum readings and really looked at all kinds of information, all kinds of texts and maybe critiqued it or done something more with it that really shows that they're trying to challenge some of that mainstream or the taken-for-granted. (Participant C)

Moreover, students' own activism demonstrates that decolonisation is an important topic, and as Participant B recognised, also one in which assignments that involve curricula critique can elicit powerful and successful results. A decolonised education is both part of students' own aspirations and vital for Black student success (El Magd, 2016). A desire to see injustices eradicated is not mutually exclusive with wishing for conventional success and our approaches to IL can 'facilitate both' (Beilin, 2016).

4.3.2 Embedding decoloniality beyond the university
Connecting transitionality with relationality, horizontal relationships are significant for ensuring that decoloniality moves beyond the realm of the university:

> Teachers at a university are only one channel, if you like, for information for the students [who] have to go out into the world and engage hopefully with different epistemologies. They have to engage with different forms of knowledge and different social groups and so you're teaching them not only about the content to do with Latin American Indigenous movements but you're also crucially teaching them: How will you recognise that you're encountering these different kinds of knowledges; and what will be your attitude towards them; and how will you collaborate to create a dialogue with those other forms of knowledge? (Participant B)

Decolonising the curriculum is important not just in one singular module or even a university context but in a much broader sense of education and the wider picture of a world beyond the university:

> If [education] stays in the realm of … HE institutions then that's not enough, but if we think of education as something more than that, it's something that students take with them in their lives, also beyond campus, that's where the importance [of decolonisation in HE] lies. (Participant C)

IL teaching can support decolonial learning by fostering horizontal classroom relationships and examining the politics of the knowledge and information produced in the university, as well as encouraging broader thinking about where information might be found beyond the boundaries of academic knowledge production. A decolonising IL might also consider how we interact with such information, moving beyond the narrow confines of traditional IL's source evaluation checklists to more socio-cultural understandings of information (Hicks & Lloyd, 2016; Lloyd, 2005) and the complex approaches, alternative media and counter-stories espoused by Pashia (2017) and Rapchak (2019).

Ultimately, all of these themes, organised in the framework of positionality, relationality and transitionality have the effect of unsettling IL as it has traditionally been understood and practised in UK academic libraries.

5. Discussion and recommendations

Examining the findings from the interview data in the context of literature reviewed, I make the following recommendations about how IL in academic libraries could be unsettled to support decolonisation. They could be considered a starting point for 'generating the potential for decolonisation' (Adebisi, 2020) rather than ultimate solutions for a decolonised IL.

5.1 Embrace the value of non-traditional and non-textual information

IL in academic libraries has traditionally dealt exclusively with 'book knowledge' (hooks, 1994); the written word, literate culture and knowledge that must fit the dimensions 'predefined by a cultural, social and economic elite' (Pawley, 2003, p. 427). But to pave a way for decolonising the curriculum, IL must be unsettled to recognise that information comes in many social, embodied, material and non-academic forms including oral, visual, musical and object-based information, through interactions with people and from learner's lived experience. The findings indicate that academic researchers are especially interested in utilising non-traditional forms of information to destabilise, disrupt and create a sensation of difference. They want to encourage students to critically engage with knowledge in non-academic forms and offer opportunities for accessing social, experiential and embodied information. This echoes the literature which argues that alternative oral and musical forms of information should not be discounted (Plockey & Ahamed, 2016), and which sites social models of IL as an important alternative to traditional approaches aligned with the 'pejoratives of western educational practices' (Lloyd, 2005, p. 83). A decolonial IL should embrace non-academic and non-textual forms of information.

5.2 Reconsider how we value and evaluate sources, authority and legitimacy

Beyond thinking more explicitly about how we help students and researchers to discover information that goes beyond the Anglo-American publishing models, canonical Eurocentric knowledge and textual information deemed academic, we should be naming and drawing those characteristics of the information to the fore, asking in whose interests certain knowledge is legitimised and thus initiating more sensitive conversations about evaluating information. Reading lists are often understood as a key theatre for decolonising the curriculum but the literature showed that decolonisation is not 'a calculation about how many black or brown authors are on the reading list' (Dar et al., 2020). The findings demonstrate that gathering diverse information sources is an important approach for challenging Eurocentric approaches to knowledge. However, academics noted that this was not always a simple process; they were keen to avoid binary understandings of de/colonial knowledge production. Instead, a recurring theme was the value of gap-finding: critiquing the information and the construction of lists in themselves, thinking about how marginalisations in information are racialised, gendered and classed, and the implications of those deficiencies. This echoes some of the CIL teaching practices addressed in the literature review, for example unpicking the role and value of reading lists themselves (McCluskey Dean, 2020) and more complex approaches to evaluating sources and credibility (Pashia, 2017; Rapchak, 2019). IL has traditionally been understood in mechanistic, procedural terms, relying on reading lists and peer review as arbiters of value. But this research indicates that decolonisation requires a positional approach that encourages learners to see that all knowledge is situated, the information presented is always curated and has complicated colonial and decolonial contexts of production.

5.3 Be sensitive to the language of information

Interactions with English-language information and the underlying power structures of an (assumed) anglocentric information landscape have significant ramifications for decolonisation and should remain at the forefront of reflecting on the way we teach about information. This might include asking questions such as:

- What information is communicated in English?
- What are the implications of translation?
- What information do we miss when we only use English?
- 'How do you center colonial subjects in a language their memories can't be spoken in?' (Manzoor-Khan, 2017b).

Critical gap-finding exercises would be all the richer for the recognition of English-language hegemony and the inclusion of language as one further relationship of power. Drawing attention to what we cannot access or understand not only encourages us to think about the structures of information, but also enables us to learn from those 'spaces of silence' (hooks, 1994, p. 174) and perhaps 'experience otherness' (Phipps, 2019, p. 3, citing Mbembe).

A more nuanced appreciation of language in information environments would involve valuing non-English language information whilst also recognising the limits of multilingualism for decolonisation; several participants in the study reflected that their bi- or tri-lingualism is not enough to 'be radical' (Participant D) or 'challenge a world view' (Participant C) and, as Phipps recognises, multilingualism is 'largely experienced as a colonial practice for many of the world's populations' (2019, p. 1). The findings indicated that English may purposefully be used to reach more inclusive audiences, but it would be prudent to remember that we miss infinite ways of learning and manifold types of information when we assume a monolingual English information landscape and promote monolingualism as both norm and ideal (Conlon Perugini & Johnson, 2020).

5.4 Expose libraries' coloniality

To date, libraries' efforts to engage in decolonising the curriculum have centred on collection development initiatives, reading list statistical analyses and managerial responses that situate decolonisation within institutional Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) agendas. These might usefully be interpreted through the lens of what Hudson calls the 'whiteness of practicality' (2017a). Practical, pragmatic, technical and administrative responses to decolonisation mean that we remain non-committal in our analysis of how libraries are implicated in perpetuating whiteness and coloniality. Moving away from the solutions libraries can offer to instead reflect on how libraries remain part of the problem would be a productive starting point for a decolonisation which should 'unsettle, provoke, stimulate and dismantle' (Manzoor-Khan, 2017b).

The findings revealed that stressing the non-neutrality of libraries is important because there are then a series of implications for working with library information in a decolonial way. Academic researchers are already thinking about how libraries perpetuate coloniality through knowledge organisation, collecting practices and search result ranking. Exposing the way that libraries are complicit in the denial, erasure and misattribution of information can exemplify the way racism

and coloniality are re-produced, reified and institutionalised in universities; perhaps unsettling for those who work in and with libraries and their resources but necessary for enabling decolonial approaches in teaching and research.

On the other hand, two participants were enthusiastic to position the library as a 'site of resistance'. Developing one of the central tenets of CIL which emphasises students as creators of knowledge and agents within institutions, perhaps one way of opening libraries' potential for resistance is to self-reflexively communicate with users about how library collections are developed over time and the stake they have through democratised collection development strategies.

5.5 Appreciate the time and labour of decolonial work

The burden of decolonising curricula was a recurring theme in the literature (Dar et al., 2020; Ogunbiyi, 2017; Pete, 2018) and the time and labour involved in decolonising work also cropped up in the findings. As Participant D emphasised, 'diversity is actually work'. One of Liyanage's key recommendations for decolonising curricula is to hire a scholar trained in decolonial pedagogy to work specifically on decolonisation within a particular department and act as a point of reference for other members of academic staff who are adjusting syllabi and reading lists (2020). This approach would address several of the themes emerging from this research. Firstly, that academic researchers have a particularly nuanced appreciation for the colonial and decolonial contexts of information in their discipline; we must not imagine that librarians can replace academics' in-depth, reflective processes for developing reading lists. Nonetheless, working with a dedicated departmental contact to consider how libraries might support and situate non-textual and non-academic information, encourage reading list critique, gap-finding, nuanced approaches to evaluation and more sensitive appreciation of the language and de/colonial contexts of information would be valuable. Advocating for a departmental staff member or offering an incentive, similar to an OER grant program (SPARC, 2018) for academics to revise reading lists to include diversified library acquisitions and work with librarians to integrate decolonial CIL into courses would also recognise the time, expertise and labour required for decolonising work. It would incentivise and factor decolonisation into staff time rather than falling to students to fill curricular gaps and campaign for an education which moves beyond Eurocentric and colonial constructions.

5.6 Pursue pedagogies of relationality and transitionality

The findings broadly organised under the themes of relationality and transitionality demonstrate that the pedagogical purpose and operations of the university are considered as important as content and information itself for decolonising the curriculum. IL teaching which pursues these pedagogies would valuably consolidate decolonising approaches in libraries.

Firstly, academics with an interest in decolonisation are attuned to the value of critical pedagogies, in particular more democratic forms of teaching and learning that value student experience in knowledge-creation. Horizontal classroom relationships are a key tenet of critical pedagogy embraced by CIL (Elmborg, 2012) and the findings reinforced the value of breaking down classroom power dynamics for engaging with decolonising themes and practices. The focus on utilising students' own experience also reflects the literature on culturally relevant pedagogies (Morrison, 2017) which condemn racialised deficit models of engagement. This study more explicitly links these strategies to decolonising the curriculum and they should be pursued by educators thinking about decolonisation in library contexts.

Secondly, the findings reveal significant tensions in the relationship between decolonisation and academic success in both student learning and academic research contexts. This reflects Drabinski's outline of the competing kairotic forces of criticality and compliance for librarians (Drabinski, 2017). Rather than relying on success alone as a framework, reflecting on transitionality and the wider significance and purpose of university knowledge production would be a beneficial approach for exploiting IL in decolonising agendas.

6. Conclusion

This article has produced valuable insights into the relationship between IL and decolonising the curriculum. Drawing together diverse IL literature under the decolonisation umbrella, it has revealed compelling critiques of traditional IL that demonstrate its colonising nature on teaching, institutional policy and theoretical levels. CIL is proposed as a more natural accomplice for decolonisation despite the notable gaps in its reckoning with issues of race, white supremacy and colonialism. Multiple analyses and teaching examples from the CIL field exemplify librarians' engagement with socio-political contexts of knowledge production, in particular the structural racism of information production, dissemination and organisation, as well as explicitly centring race in learner interactions. This qualitative study introduces decolonial considerations to IL by exploring how academic researchers position CIL. The findings reveal that it might usefully facilitate positionality, practice relationality and consider transitionality.

The research has generated several issues worthy of further investigation. Firstly, it would be interesting to more fully explore the implications of language and the oft-assumed anglocentric information landscape, perhaps adding a decolonial focus to existing research on world languages and IL (Hicks, 2013) and thinking about the library's role in advocating for and facilitating multilingual, open access information (Hirmer & Istratii, n.d.; McElroy & Bridges, 2015). The disciplinary differences between Law and Geography and recurring discussions with participants on the significance of epistemology indicate that a broader spread of disciplinary approaches to exploring CIL and decolonisation would also be productive. The possibility of the library as a 'site of resistance' was left underexplored but would be a compelling case for future activity. Finally, although I have tried to pay attention to student voices in the literature cited, CIL is primarily concerned with empowering learners so their ideas and responses have felt missing from this study. Future research could beneficially consult students on how they envisage decolonial information practices and explore their responses to a decolonising CIL.

This research is not about actionable solutions but a call to action for experimentation that unsettles IL. On one level, our conception of IL in itself needs to be unsettled, to create a decolonial critical information literacy that pays attention to power structures, recognises social and embodied forms of information and validates diverse information practices. The techniques that emerge in the findings are also designed to unsettle, to be troublesome: whether that be complicating our relationship with the library by drawing attention to its non-neutrality, altering the hierarchical foundations of relationships between learners and educators, creating a sensation of difference in the language of information we present and the representations of knowledge we juxtapose or finding the gaps in source references, reading lists and curricula. IL must also remain unsettled in the way we might understand it to be a remedy; it should not become another form of settler-harm reduction for academia.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Decolonisation, information and teaching/research practices section

- How do you address questions of decolonisation in your own research or teaching practices? Is this new, purposeful, how has it gone down? Has it been in any way a response to the student movement to decolonise the curriculum?
- Have you thought about information in relation to decolonisation?
- Do you use information for your teaching and/or research which is in any way colonial? How would you say the information itself reflects coloniality? How do you interact with that?
- What about a coloniality in the way that information is produced, disseminated, organised, circulated, evaluated, or used in your teaching/ research? Are there any particular information practices that are in any way colonial/ reflect coloniality? Is this something you think about in your research and/or teaching?
- Could you say anything about the language of information that you use in your research and your teaching? Do you ever use resources in languages other than English? What are your information practices around such information?

IL, decolonisation section

- I'm specifically interested in thinking about how we can address questions of decolonisation in relation to studying and teaching/learning about information. The definition I have given you presents two different ways of teaching about information and I'm interested to hear your reaction in terms of your own experience in using and teaching about information. Does one ring a bell, seem unfeasible, seen inspirational, seem familiar…
- Do you see a role for critical information literacy, as defined above, in engaging students in decolonising ideas about information and knowledge and in teaching about libraries and information practices?
- Could these reflections on de/colonial information and information practices be integrated into your research and, in collaboration with librarians, into how we teach students about information and information practices?
- What do decolonial information and information practices look like?
- How does an engagement with decolonial information and information practices interact with students' success and their fulfilling the aims of a course/ module/ paper?
- What about students' use of non-English-language information? Does any of this have a bearing on decolonising the university?

Appendix B

Definition of critical information literacy

Information literacy has traditionally been understood as how we find, evaluate and use information: taught as a set of practical tools to support students to approach research in a strategic way. Critical information literacy looks beyond and critiques this functional, competency-based understanding of finding and using information. It considers the ways we can encourage students to develop a critical consciousness about information; to engage with and act upon the underlying power structures of information including its creation/ production, dissemination, organisation, use, evaluation, circulation, accessibility etc and to ask questions about the library's role in structuring and presenting a single knowable reality. Critical information literacy also emboldens the learner's agency in an educational process; thinking about students as collaborators and creators of knowledge.

Adapted from Accardi, Drabinski and Kumbier (2010), Elmborg (2006), and Downey (2016).