

Diversifying the Curriculum Blog Post

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On 14th February 2024 the University of Manchester Department of Law hosted Professor Foluke Adebisi from the University of Bristol with Diversifying the Curriculum funding provided by the School of Social Sciences Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Committee. Professor Adebisi is a long-time champion and scholar of decolonising the law and has published a range of blogs, articles, most recently a monograph titled *Decolonisation and Legal Knowledge: Reflections on Power and Possibility*. This is the first book that considers this subject in depth. The aim of the visit and activities was to generate a dialogue within the law department at Manchester—amongst members of staff, between staff and students and amongst students—about ways in which legal curricula may be made more inclusive of traditionally underrepresented groups and ideologies but also how the wider power dynamics underpinning the law may be made more explicit.

Professor Adebisi gave two talks on the topic of '*Dreaming of anticolonial worlds from within the law school: Beyond diversifying the curriculum*'. The first of these was delivered in the morning. It was chaired by Dr. Eleanor Aspey and was addressed specifically to members of the staff of the Law Department. The second talk was delivered as part of the course programme for a new methodology module, on the post-graduate courses on healthcare ethics run by the Centre of Social Ethics and Policy, in the Law Department. This was delivered in the afternoon on the same day and was chaired by Dr Lucy Frith who is the module convenor. Information about both sessions was widely circulated in the law department and throughout the School of Social Sciences given its relevance for all disciplines interested in critically reflecting on their teaching and research.

Dr Aspey, who Chaired the session arranged for staff, was of the view that the true aim of the project was to support staff in reflecting critically on their teaching practice. She believed that the seminar offered important insights into the concept of decolonisation and what it entails, and how staff may include these considerations while designing units and delivering teaching. The talk delivered to the staff particularly emphasized the importance of avoiding a tick-box approach and noting the limitations of decolonisation. It was explained that given how law has developed over time it may not be possible to fully decolonise the curriculum, however, it is both possible and necessary to identify the underpinning power structures associated with the legal material generally taught in English law schools.

The students who attended the second talk of the day were well primed for this discussion as the course programme of the 'Research Methods in bioethics and law' module aims to introduce students to different methodological approaches used in the study of bioethics, law and socio-legal studies, encourage critical thinking about these different approaches and prepare students for further post-graduate research. The module has the two-pronged aim to question methodologies (ie to ensure that postcolonial, indigenous and critical race theorists' critiques and approaches to

epistemology, methodology and research ethics are investigated and that readings and discussions challenge and position the Eurocentric cannon, to both situate ideas of universal moral theorising in their historical-cultural context and to encourage engagement with non-western ethical traditions and new thought in bioethics. Dr Frith reports that Professor Adebisi's 'talk spoke to both these aims and the students found the session invaluable in helping them to integrate key issues in the 'decolonisation of law and the law curriculum' and their wider discussions on the methodology and content of bioethics and legal research. The feedback was very positive and they mentioned that they would be able to use their learning from the talk in the planning of their research projects and their work going.'

The key challenge appears to be to get more staff to engage with these issues and it is in this area where we propose to focus the greater part of our next steps. It is important for this purpose to create space to have more discussions around this issue, with the aim of building on Professor Adebisi's talk to discuss practical methods of considering decolonisation in their teaching. This may be done on a Teaching or Research Away Day where staff may be invited to reflect on their teaching materials as well as their own research and to identify possibilities of decolonisation. Prof Adebisi's visit has prompted discussion of these issues in our department and it is an area that needs ongoing consideration across SoSS and the wider university.