

## Decoloni-Tea Workshop

9th January 2026, Somerville College

**Attendance:** Iyiola Solanke, Jonathan Herring, Rebecca Williams, Stephen Weatherill, Aradhana Cherupara Vadakkethil, Mihika Poddar, Rosario Grimà Algora

Prof Iyiola Solanke introduced the project on decolonising the curriculum, which revolves around three main pillars: (i) challenging the foundational assumptions of the curriculum; (ii) identifying the current gaps and incorporating decolonial material into the current curriculum; and (iii) redesigning the curriculum from a decolonial perspective. She then introduced the concept of decolonisation and provided an overview of initiatives undertaken by other universities (Leeds, SOAS, Kent or University of Cape Town).

During the discussion, participants particularly appreciated the framing of decolonisation as a positive democratising exercise that would enrich the curriculum by exposing students to different perspectives, moving away from the idea of just one answer and generally increasing the complexity with which topics are studied. This was also seen to offer a general pedagogical benefit: retention of knowledge remains crucial for lawyers but in the age of AI the ability to appreciate different perspectives and their impact on law is of increasing value.

There was also a discussion of some of the former initiatives at the University of Oxford/Law Faculty on diversity: for instance, Prof Jonathan Herring used to provide an introductory lecture in week 0 to students on diversity, but this practice has stopped.

Rosario and Mihika then presented their work on decolonising the EU law and Criminal law curriculum based on the three pillars outlined above. The discussion highlighted that the challenges involved in decolonising these curricula differ significantly, particularly on the availability of literature and on the maturity of students.

For EU law, a major challenge was the scarcity of literature on decolonisation relating to areas such as freedom of movement of goods and services. Most of the existing literature in EU law falls outside the curriculum (border control, migration and refugees, external relations, etc). Participants agreed that the EU law curriculum omits any discussions on Empire, and that there is a need to complement the internal story with an external story to “remedy this past blindness”. It was agreed that including these perspectives could enrich the curriculum, broaden students’ understanding and would force rethinking of the EU and its founding myth. It was agreed that adding additional readings or questions to Tutorial 1 would be a relatively straightforward initial step towards decolonising the EU law curriculum.

In contrast, a main challenge for criminal law was the abundance of literature. However, much of this literature focuses on areas not covered under the 1L curriculum (such as criminology, policing, etc). Some of these topics are covered in the BCL course on Advanced Criminal Law. Participants also discussed that criminal law is already a dense curriculum, and that there are currently difficulties with teaching some tutorials (i.e. sexual violence). However, it was seen as important to start already in the first year breaking some of the intellectual silos, such as the division between criminal law and criminology.

Another important difference is the year of study of students enrolled in each course. Criminal law students are in their first year, which means that tutorials often focus on ensuring that students understand foundational legal concepts, how to write legal essays, and how to

approach problem questions. In EU law, students are finalists, which allows for greater flexibility in introducing additional critical readings.

Common issues discussed and agreed:

1. Participants discussed practical strategies to decolonise the curriculum, and several alternatives were discussed, i.e. adding material to the existing curriculum, explaining decolonial approaches in lectures, or adding the material as additional summer or winter reading. It was noted that students mostly focus on exams, so if the material is not included in the exam, some might not engage with it. Additionally, if the material is presented as optional, or readings to do in summer or over the break, then only the most studious students will read it, giving them an advantage. Similarly, it was discussed that not all students can engage in reading material during summer/breaks, as some might have care, work or other commitments.
2. Jonathan used to give an introductory lecture on diversity and inclusion, but this stopped. An option discussed was to start including a lecture on decolonisation in the introductory weeks, drawing links to the different topics to be studied. There was no agreement as to whether this lecture should only be on decolonial approaches, or to have a broader series on critical legal approaches (for both undergraduates and postgraduates during the introductory week). It was noted that including all different critical perspectives could overwhelm students, so it needs to be done in a way that integrates different perspectives and brings them together, also to avoid being tokenistic. This could be a relatively easy way for students to engage with this material in all subjects. If a way is found to do this, one option would be to re-design the Mods exam to include broader questions.
3. Overall, there was an understanding that engaging with critical legal perspectives is beneficial for students, and it will prepare them better for exams, legal thinking and for their future careers – especially now that with AI skills such as critical thinking, recognising bias, spotting trends and drifts etc. will be much more needed.
4. There was a debate on the difficulty of changing the curriculum, particularly as some professors now teaching might have little incentive to modify their teaching, especially if tutors are not specialists in the area.
5. There was a consensus that we will create a reading list for the Oxford Law website, which will be available for tutors but also for an external audience. There is already a [reading list on decolonising the law](#), but this new list could be specific to criminal law and EU law. It could also include annotations summarising the perspectives offered by the authors and ways in which they could be incorporated into teaching.
6. An additional suggestion was the creation of a mini-option in Jurisprudence to expose UG students to decolonial theory and its interaction with different areas of law eg EU, criminal, international, environmental etc