What is Decolonisation?

Decolonisation means **finding**, **acknowledging,** and **challenging** how **colonial** narratives have affected our perceived **knowledge** and **understanding**.

Diversity

Including people with **different** backgrounds and characteristics to reading lists, staff, and the student body

This is the **examination** of content in place, and the **history** of how it came into the syllabus in the first place

VS

Decolonisation

This is the **presence** of **perspectives** and an important **step** in **decolonisation!**

To decolonise we **dismantle** colonial **forms of knowledge**, specifically those that **racialise** and categorize

Why Data Science?

Who **decides** what data is **needed**? Who **provides** data, and decides its **purposes**? Who **controls** how data is used? Lingering colonial practices are embedded in the field of data science, they set a standard that is causing a global imbalance in power. Recognizing and eliminated these biases will level the playing field.

What next?

Keep an eye out for the weekly email! If you're keen to learn more, consider reading the following article:

"An Agenda for Decolonizing Data Science" by Noopur Raval, Spheres: Journal for Digital Cultures (2019)

1 | Educate Yourself

The **first step** in approaching data science with decolonisation in mind is to **understand** the **impact** of **colonization** on data science. But don't worry, that's where we come in!
We can summarise the majority of colonial impact into how data has been **collected** and **used**.

Data Extraction

Data has historically been **extracted** by colonial powers from colonies **without consent**. This data was used to **perpetuate** and **justify** colonial rule.

Data Bias

Data sets **collected** by colonial powers are often biased towards their interests, and may not accurately reflect the experience of people in colonies

Data Exploitation

Data collected from a colony can be **exploited** for economical gain, for example identifying natural resources which can be extracted and sold

Data Control

Colonial powers often **control** the **flow** of data in and out of colonies, people in these colonies then find it difficult to **access** or use their own data. This control has been used to s**uppress dissent** or **promote colonial agendas.**

What next?

"Artificial intelligence is creating a new colonial world order" published by MIT outlines the way AI is being developed globally to exacerbate these **colonial power dynamics** and create **new forms of exploitation**. One example being how AI surveillance tools are **monitoring and targeting** black communities in South Africa.

Step 2 | Engage with Communities

The best way to understand the **impacts** of colonialism, and how to **mitigate** them is to listen to and make space for people in **marginalised** communities. For us, this means listening to **new perspectives** in our learning. There are two ways you can contribute to this.

Independent Research

Reading articles or books from marginalised communities allow you to learn outside of a **colonial lens**, with explanations and methods that may be more **useful** and **intuitive** to your learning.

If we actively **center** the knowledge of and **collaborate** with communities **impacted by colonial data science practices,** we will be able to **co-designing** research projects promoting **data sovereignty**, the **right** of communities or nations to **govern** and **have control** over their own data , and creating **more inclusive and empowering data practices**

Collaborate with Us

If you are interested in learning more, contact the MDS department and we will provide you with **resources** to broaden your understanding. To participate, keep an eye out for calls to engage or events hosted by the uni as a whole.

What next?

Try these articles to learn more about non-western data practices!

"Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward an Agenda" by Tahu Kukutai and John Taylor

Data orientalism: on the algorithmic construction of the non-Western other by Dan M. Kotliar

Step 3 | Challenge Assumptions

Challenging our **assumptions** may lead to uncovering hidden **biases**, **recognizing** diverse knowledge systems, fostering **innovation** and **creativity,** and overcoming data **extraction** and **exploitation**. Through critical examination and reevaluation we can create more **inclusive** and **ethical** data practices.

What are our Assumptions?

Universalism: Western systems are universally applicable and superior

Objectivity: Data and algorithms are inherently objective and neutral

Data ownership and control: Data can be controlled and owned by the collectors/possessors

Homogenization and erasure: Generalisation of unique cultures within diverse communities

Biased data and algorithmic discrimination:Historical biases and systemic injustices can be reflected in datasets and algorithms, leading to discriminatory outcomes and perpetuating inequalities

Data is often **extracted** from communities without their **informed consent** or **meaningful involvement**. These then Western-centric knowledge systems, **disregard** or **devalue** alternative knowledge.

What next?

Try the article, "Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data's Relation to the Contemporary Subject" by Nick Couldry and Ulises A. Mejias

Step 4 | Ethical Data Governance

Practicing **ethical** data governance in data science is how we **ensure responsible** and **accountable** data practices. We should prioritize ethical considerations in data **collection**, **analysis**, and **interpretation**. This involves respecting **privacy**, **consent**, and **data sovereignty**. This will **protect** and **empower** marginalized communities. Here are some key principles to consider:

These practices **contribute** to an **ethical** and **inclusive** data landscape that respects **individual rights**. **Protecting** marginalised communities from the **exploitation**.

What next?

Consider reading "Data Ethics Framework" outlined by the UK government to learn which of these practices have been made lawful.

What is Ethical Data Governance?

Informed Consent: Collect and use data clearly communicating how data will be used, who will have access, and potential risks.

Bias and Fairness: Identify and mitigate biases in data collection and analysis. Ensure algorithms avoid discriminating against marginalized groups.

Data Ownership and Control: Respect ownership of data. Enable individuals and communities control over their data, how it is used, shared and interpreted. Collaborate with those that prioritize data sovereignty

Continuous Learning and Adaptation: Stay updated on emerging ethical issues and best practices!

Step 5 | Contextualize and Interpret Data

Contextualizing and **interpreting** data in the context of decolonisation involves **acknowledging** and **addressing** the **historical** and **cultural contexts** that shape data to **avoid generalizations**. Acknowledge the **complexities** and **diversity** of **communities** and **avoid reductive** or **harmful narratives**. Here are some considerations for this process:

How do we Contextualize and Interpret Data?

Historical Context: Understand legacies of colonialism and how they influenced data collection, representation, and analysis practices.

Reflexivity: Reflecting on your own biases as a data scientist. Seek diverse perspectives and engage in dialogue to challenge and broaden your understanding.

Intersectionality: Recognize and consider the intersecting dimensions of identity, such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity, in data interpretation. Understand how multiple forms of oppression and privilege influence data patterns and outcomes.

Critical Data Analysis: Uncover hidden biases, power dynamics, and assumptions in the data you work with.

By **contextualizing** and **interpreting** data through a decolonial lens, we **dismantle colonial narratives**, **challenge biases**, and promote an **inclusive** data landscape.

What next?

"Decolonising quantitative research methods pedagogy: Teaching contemporary politics to challenge hierarchies from data" by wiener-Collins et al, has an in depth look at why we need to decolonise our data practices.

The end of Decolonisation?

As the year comes to an end, so does this newsletter. Thank you to everyone who read these issues, I hope you feel that you have a better understanding of what decolonisation is and it's importance in the field of data science. However this is not the end of our decolonisation efforts.

What should I do now?

Catch up on any issues you may have missed and encourage your friends and peers to read them as well. If you want to test your understanding on decolonisation take the quiz.
Remember to educate yourself, engage with marginalised communities, challenge your own assumptions, practice ethical governance and contextualize the data you will be asked to work with.
And finally, keep an eye out on future decolonisation efforts put out by your programs!

In order to test how effective we've been in introducing you to decolonisation, we would appreciate you keeping an eye out for our end of term survey. If you found these newsletters useful please tell us, if you felt otherwise we would really appreciate your feedback on how to improve.