

## Decolonizing marketing

Eckhardt, Giana M.; Belk, Russell W.; Bradford, Tonya; Dobscha, Susan; Ger, Guliz; Varman, Rohit

DOI:

[10.1080/10253866.2021.1996734](https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2021.1996734)

License:

Creative Commons: Attribution (CC BY)

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Eckhardt, GM, Belk, RW, Bradford, T, Dobscha, S, Ger, G & Varman, R 2022, 'Decolonizing marketing', *Consumption Markets and Culture*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 176–186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2021.1996734>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

### General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

### Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.



## Decolonizing marketing

Giana M. Eckhardt, Russell Belk, Tonya Williams Bradford, Susan Dobscha, Güliz Ger & Rohit Varman

To cite this article: Giana M. Eckhardt, Russell Belk, Tonya Williams Bradford, Susan Dobscha, Güliz Ger & Rohit Varman (2022) Decolonizing marketing, Consumption Markets & Culture, 25:2, 176-186, DOI: [10.1080/10253866.2021.1996734](https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2021.1996734)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2021.1996734>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 10 Nov 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 3213



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)



## Decolonizing marketing

Giana M. Eckhardt<sup>a</sup>, Russell Belk<sup>b</sup>, Tonya Williams Bradford<sup>c</sup>, Susan Dobscha<sup>d</sup>, Güliz Ger<sup>e,f</sup> and Rohit Varman<sup>g</sup>

<sup>a</sup>King's Business School, King's College London, London, England; <sup>b</sup>Kraft Foods Canada Chair in Marketing, Schulich School of Business, York University, Toronto, Canada; <sup>c</sup>Paul Merage School of Business, University of California, Irvine, CA, USA; <sup>d</sup>Department of Marketing, Bentley University, Boston, MA, USA; <sup>e</sup>Faculty of Business Administration, Bilkent University, Bilkent, Turkey; <sup>f</sup>Skema (MINT Research Center), Lille, France; <sup>g</sup>Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, England

### ABSTRACT

In January 2021, the ETHOS Research Center at Bayes Business School, along with the CRIS Research Center at Royal Holloway University of London, hosted an event entitled Decolonizing the Business School. Over 500 attendees participated, from all business disciplines, testifying to the strong levels of interest in this topic. Marketing was particularly active, with over 100 participants. In this article, I (Giana Eckhardt, one of the organizers of the event) speak with the marketing break out room facilitators – Russ Belk, Tonya Bradford, Susan Dobscha, Güliz Ger and Rohit Varman – in a wide-ranging conversation about what decolonization means to the field of marketing, and what marketing academics can do if they would like to explore these ideas further. First, we offer a brief introduction to decolonization. Also, a list of resources for the interested reader is presented as well as ideas for further exploration in this nascent domain at the end.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 1 September 2021  
Accepted 15 October 2021

### KEYWORDS

Decolonization; marketing; colonialism; capitalism; pedagogy; research

## What is decolonization?

Decolonization is a movement which seeks to identify colonial histories that inform our curriculum and our pedagogical practices and challenge them (Banerjee 2021). It acknowledges that colonialism is and was integral to capitalism and seeks to link structures of colonialism to the curriculum. Capitalism in its different forms- colonial, slave, mercantile, financial, market – has used racist logic to demarcate whiteness from others and to distribute wealth and privileges along racial lines. As Dar et al. (2021) observe, capitalism is racist and educational institutions like universities and business schools within them that reproduce its ideology should be critiqued.

Western universities are a key site through which colonialism and colonial knowledge are produced, institutionalized, and naturalized (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancıoğlu 2018). There is a need to not only deconstruct but also transform such a system of knowledge. Such transformations will require critical reflexivity in knowledge production and dissemination to enable political praxis. The structural consequences of colonialism and racist capitalism, for example, can be taught in the classroom in relation to issues like climate change (Banerjee 2021). Decolonization involves a paradigm shift from a culture of exclusion, furtherance of capitalist social

**CONTACT** Giana M. Eckhardt ✉ [giana.eckhardt@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:giana.eckhardt@kcl.ac.uk) 📠 Professor of Marketing, King's Business School, King's College London, London, England

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

relations, and denial of history, to make space for other political philosophies and knowledge systems. It is a structural shift to think more widely about why common knowledge is what it is, and in so doing adjust socio-economic structures and power relations in real and significant ways (Keele University 2018).

Decolonizing is not about assimilating new material from non-Western locations into existing theories. Rather, it is about questioning the underpinning of those theories and acknowledging that there may be multiple ways of knowing and doing. Bannerjee, Rodriguez, and Dar (2020) identify the over-representation of white academics in business schools, the use of English as the dominant language of business, along with the fact that the most powerful business schools are located in North America and Europe, as some of the ways in which colonialism still manifests itself within business schools. Decolonizing requires epistemic shifts by interrogating the dominant Eurocentric perspective and critiquing the theoretical canon that reproduces it. It also requires a critical evaluation of research questions, how such questions are examined, and who benefits from the knowledge claims. Kelly and Hrenyk (2020) remind us that business schools and the scholars within them also have fingerprints on climate crises and racial and social injustice, as they are both a tool for, and a product of, shareholder-centric, profit-maximizing and extractionist economics. Moreover, as Varman and his colleagues observe, decolonization is about challenging capitalism and interrogating corporate exploitation (Varman and Al-Amoudi 2016; Varman and Vijay 2018).

Crucially, decolonization is not only diversity and inclusion. Rather, it seeks to disrupt status quo ways of thinking and teaching, not simply include a more diverse set of people in the same conversation. Within consumer research, *Consumption, Markets and Culture* has been a pioneer in this space, publishing some of the first articles which interrogated whiteness as a marker against which other cultures become the “other” (Burton 2009) and revealing how contemporary advertisements suggest inferior African “otherness” (Bonsu 2009). In particular, Bonsu (2009) shows how the brutality of colonialism in Africa is perpetuated in contemporary ads. In light of the Black Lives Matter movement which has received greater prominence beginning in 2020, conversations around racial justice have become more prominent within business schools and in the field of marketing (Bruce et al. 2020; Poole et al. 2020). A decolonization perspective suggests that anti-racism cannot be framed as a diversity project without understanding the colonial structures of racial injustice that created the slave trade, and which continue to underpin the logic of many business practices.

Ultimately, engaging in decolonizing may be confronting and uncomfortable and involve unlearning our own privileges as business school educators (Banerjee 2021). Next, we explore these issues and approaches within marketing in our conversation, recorded over Zoom in February 2021.

## What is decolonizing within the marketing discipline?

**GIANA:** What does decolonization in marketing mean to you?

**GÜLİZ:** I want to make a distinction between working, living, teaching, and doing research in the south versus in the north. Being from the south, first and foremost, I start thinking about what are the things I can do agentically, versus what are the structural restraints and constraints that are beyond my reach. What I can do is first and foremost is deal with my own colonized mind. I’ve been educated starting from high school in English, and I teach at an institution where the teaching medium is in English. The top universities in Turkey all teach in English. The mindset in these universities is that we must use the same textbooks that the top US schools use, have the same curriculum. There is, in the professor’s and the student’s mind, and the Board of Trustee’s mind, this notion that the best education is done if it’s in English, and if it follows the norms of top universities in the U.S. What I try to do first and foremost is find ways to deal with my own colonized mind and use that as a way to have an engaging discussion with my students to try to open them up to think about their own colonized minds, their parents, and the institutions around them. Students want jobs in global corporations.

As Erkmen (2018) finds, working in one is a means of distinction at the global level. Reflecting on our colonized minds pertains to teaching materials, teaching examples, the content, as well as the process of teaching. The process of teaching for me is also very important, because every discussion, every example, every question, I need to think in terms of not just the content that I want to teach, but also this critical reflexivity about not just coloniality, but other dominance and power related issues as well, which are obviously related to each other. I think if we carry this mindset to our research, it will help us in our teaching, and they will feed off of each other. I try to reflect about coloniality and other power dynamics, which is in almost every piece of research that I do. Everything that I write, whether it is about coloniality or not. And unless I do that, I don't think I can deal with my own colonized mind. Accordingly, I try to engage my students in discussions and activities which I hope will develop their critical reflexivity. I also frequently ask the question of "who will benefit and who will lose from the outcomes of what you, as a manager, do or don't do?" for example, when we work on cases.

**SUSAN:** I think first of all, we need, not a standard definition, but we need a working definition of decolonization that is understood across business schools, or across our areas of interest in business schools. For, in my mind, if you're going to export this big umbrella idea, you have to have some anchoring point of what we mean. The first thing I learned is when I brought it up to other people, they all had different perspectives on what it meant. A colleague who is from one an upper caste in India, and she's lesbian, and she had a whole different view of what decolonization meant than what I thought it meant. I thought it was much more of this north/south thing. The way she described it was more about the diaspora. That there's a silencing of thought processes. There's a silencing of our ontology of how we're learning as a result of colonization. Like there used to be this idea of seven genders. And that when India got colonized by Britain, their much stricter rules about male/female biological sex were imposed on Indian thought to where the seven genders were silenced. For me, I think going forward, we need some sort of grand vision of what we mean by this, so that if I start to talk about this in a meeting, and a pricing professor says "What's that?" I can say in a very simple way what we mean by this.

**GIANA:** Good point Susan. I would agree with the idea that it's not necessarily a north/south thing. Issues of racial justice for example, which are taking place in the U.S., UK, and many other places, a lot of people would put under the umbrella of decolonization. The danger, though, of coming up with one definition of decolonization which everyone understands as the same thing could create the opportunity for reification, where everyone is like "Oh now I have to do 1, 2, 3 in order to decolonize," rather than giving it the introspection and critical thinking that it deserves. But at the same time, I agree that being able to explain it to interested parties who want to know more is important. Rohit, do you want to weigh in?

**ROHIT:** I completely agree with Susan, that we need to have some idea of what we mean by colonialism. Colonialism is a very complicated and vague term. As Dirlik (2002) points out, all history is colonial history. The very idea of civilization, the very idea of human settlement is about colonization. People have gone around, settled in places, and colonized other people. It is something which can be potentially very vague and very hard to define. I'm assuming that when we talk about colonialism in this setting, and when we have more contemporary debates on decolonization, we are talking about European colonialism. In many ways, it goes back to the north/south question. And surely aspects of transatlantic slavery and racial relationships can be subsumed under the umbrella of European colonialism. It's important to understand which colonialism we are talking about, and we also need to then have a sense of what is it that we mean by decolonization. For me, decolonization is about questioning the role of the West. It's challenging the kind of Eurocentrism that prevails in the discipline. But also there's another important aspect that I would like to highlight, and which is central to my reading of decolonization—it is the idea of anti-capitalism. European colonialism cannot be understood, it is incomprehensible without reference to capitalism. And hence any attempt to understand decolonization has to be simultaneously anti-capitalist.

Moreover, if you really read about colonialism, I mean if you understand some of the historical moments; for example, if I look into colonialism in India, British colonialism, it was not possible for the British to come in and to colonize such a large nation without there being a very active participation of local interests. If you read somebody like Mbembe (2002) for example, on African colonialism, he rightly points out that colonialism was always a co-invention. Yes, it was western violence, but also there were all these local interests that contributed to it. And if we start understanding some of these local interests, we'll see that there were aspects of commercial interest, there were aspects of capitalism, and hence colonialism and capitalism are very closely tied to each other. In my reading, we need to challenge the hegemony of the West, but also simultaneously challenge capitalism.

## Decolonization in the marketing/consumer research classroom

**GIANA:** To follow up on these issues that Rohit brought up – capitalism being something that is a central point to understanding colonization and decolonization – how would you bring out a point like that in the classroom? Or other points which are important from a decolonization perspective?

**SUSAN:** I just taught semiotics today. Semiotics is a really easy place to incorporate these ideas. When you're talking about assigning meaning to objects, cultures have different meanings for different objects. The example I used in class today was if I hold my fist up like this, what does it mean to you, right? And a Chinese woman said, "This means I make a pledge." So that was a great example of if a brand were to use this fist like this, which in the U.S. has this historic symbolism of black power, then the brand would be buying into one interpretation of this symbol. I think semiotics is one place that you can unpack some of this when you talk about how does a brand assign meaning. Vis a vis a celebrity endorser or a symbol or an image. We're going through a reckoning of that in the United States. All of our racist brands are changing their symbology. And pretty quickly too. Given that they're a hundred years old, you know. It was just this important moment in time where people are understanding the symbolism of an Aunt Jemima, you know an Uncle Ben, Mrs. Butterworth.

**GÜLİZ:** I took your question to mean how do you deal with the issues of bringing in capitalism and colonialism while teaching a marketing topic. What I do is I try to have 15 min on the dark side or dark history of whatever the topic is. For example, if it's about promotion/advertising, I bring in the de Beers "Diamonds are forever" story. And we discuss the advertising story in the backstage of diamond mining in South Africa – use of black prisoner's free labor, the occupation of the mining lands by the British empire, and the connections to the founding of apartheid in South Africa. All the while when diamonds are linked to love and romance in our minds. I bring in the supply chain and King Leopold. When I talk about supply chain, you don't have to discuss it for long, just a little video on how the supply chain has always been global, with slavery, and the cutting off hands that Leopold did in Congo. Each week's lead topic has a 15, 20 min dark side of branding, dark side of promotion, dark side of product development, where I can bring in these things. Child labor, slave labor, ancient and today, current day slave labor as well. Soap and skin whitening, you know *Lifebuoy Men*, *Lux Women*, Burke's (1996) work, and many others. I try to weave in the invisible connections of the modern stage of marketing to (post)colonialism and global capitalism. Whitening products, whatnot.

And I try to use bottom of the pyramid examples. When you use bottom of the pyramid examples, you get into the social classes, lower classes and upper classes. Then when you begin talking about classes and bottom of the pyramid, lo and behold, you get into neoliberalism and capitalism. You bring in how capitalism shapes the class formations within countries, and how capitalism shapes the power dynamic across countries. National versus local firms. So then I put a tiny little blip of neoliberalism, a tiny little thing on capitalism.

**GIANA:** I wonder how useful it is to characterize the consequences of marketing activities as the dark side. Obviously they are negative. But rather than framing them as, how can we try and mitigate the consequences, instead teaching them as fundamental to how these marketing outcomes come to be. Rohit, I know you've done research in this area examining violence in supply chains. Do you try and bring this out in the classroom?

**ROHIT:** Yes, in my classes I try to consistently raise these issues. For me, the most important task is to create a certain political grammar which is missing in business schools. And I can tell you, having taught both in India and in England, that it is a challenge. It's so completely depoliticized, most conversations that happen. As somebody who works in the area of critical theory, the biggest challenge is to bring in some consciousness about ideology. Some recognition of what is dominant and how the current zeitgeist works. And what you realize is one of the key challenges there is what Gayatri Spivak (1999, 2) would call "the system of sanctioned ignorance." For example, while teaching in India, what you realize is that students are keener to know and learn about the west. They're keener to learn about the U.S. as compared to their own local setting (see Varman and Saha 2009). Because so much of what is seen as legitimate, so much of what is seen as the right way of learning the tools, whether it's marketing tools or in any other discipline within business schools, so much of it is very Eurocentric and very Ameri-centric. That's a very significant part of the battle where you need to constantly bring in local issues, you need to challenge the dominance of a western thought processes. Güliz talked about how going to the west, or being educated in the west is an issue. Or English language is an issue. But this is far more deep-seated. The very sense of self is colonized, there's a need to refer constantly to the West to define yourself. Especially when it comes to the Indian elite. It is deeply entrenched. How we challenge it becomes one of the important questions.

I teach a course on social marketing. And what I try to do is start by talking about how subordination and exploitation are inherent to capitalism. I try to give various examples. If you look at how social marketing is structured, as an area of enquiry and how it is taught, most textbooks are very narrowly focused on the quotidian project of broadening the concept of marketing. It's all about, feel free to use marketing to screw the world, but you should smoke with a certain sense of responsibility, or drink with a certain sense of responsibility. That is the broader agenda. It becomes important then, within this agenda, to bring in some of the social issues, some of the political issues that are of significance. The second element for me which is important is to constantly historicize what I'm teaching. As bell hooks (1989, 17) points out, much of our "struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting." We need to somehow get that historical memory back of what has happened. I try to anchor around an essay on modern slavery, and that gives me an opportunity to prescribe readings on transatlantic slavery, on colonialism. It opens up conversations on some of these aspects, some of these historical aspects, and some of these contemporary issues, of exploitation. This is how I try to bring in some of these issues and to create conversations on the question of coloniality and related forms of exploitation.

**GIANA:** To follow up on one of your points, you mentioned that students, and I would say in particular MBA students who are paying a lot of money to get their degree, wherever they are in the world, often have this attitude of, what I'm paying for is to understand best practices. How do you think these kinds of conversations can be brought up in class, and how can we embed these vocabularies and examples in our classes? Beyond that, how can we get a business school audience to recognize that this is something that they do need to understand in order to be successful in the world after their degree? Things like the Black Lives Matter protests have made it a little easier for students to see that this is not something that can just be ignored while they figure out how to make the most money. But at the same time, I struggle with how to overcome that hurdle in the classroom. I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on that.

**GÜLİZ:** Well I'm going to be rather pessimistic on that. I don't think we can move from what I can do in my class to what I can do in my business school, because the business school is under the hegemony that Rohit has been talking about, and that I have been experiencing. To get to them, I think we need to get at an even more powerful set of constituencies. People who write the mainstream books. You know, Phil Kotler himself should be part of this discussion. Kotler himself should be writing about and discussing coloniality. Only then will business schools start accepting some of these topics as legitimate topics, or legitimate concerns for a business school.

**RUSS:** We have a program at Schulich (Business School, at York University). We have two actually. One is a series of webinars called Leading Through the Pandemic. What I turned that into is, what can we do in terms of pivoting to big issues at this point, given the catastrophic disruption. And so, income and equality, Black Lives Matter, and climate change are the three big ones that I address. The other program we have is particularly addressed to Black Lives Matter. That is particularly focused on what it means to business schools.

Also, I've got three types of people in my classes. I teach mostly at the graduate level. I've got about equally represented Canadians, Indians, and Chinese. As well as second generation Indians, and Chinese, and third and fourth generation, in some cases. Canada had this horrible policy of not admitting that there was slavery in Canada for over 200 years. And furthermore, they have this idealistic story that's in all of the grade school books about the underground railroad. Canada was the terminus for that, and so Canada was wonderful and the United States was evil. It was painting this very unrealistic portrait. The real shame these days in Canada is first nations people, indigenous people. And that's a global issue. Australia and Canada are bad, and the U.S. is really bad. We had residential schools that robbed children of their names. There was lots of sexual abuse; and it robbed that robbed them of their language, it robbed them of their heritage basically. And that too is something that is not taught in school. But what I do with those three groups of people, I'll try to have Canadians tell their story as best they can, and it's amazing how many of them don't know these basic historic facts. For Chinese and Indians, the situation is a little bit different. I ask the Indians to tell me about what colonialism was like, what was independence like, what are class relationships like now. China on the other hand is different because they were officially never colonized, but they had their treaty port cities of Shanghai and Hong Kong. And there the enclaves were



horribly racist, they were reportedly signs up in a Shanghai park that said no dogs or Chinese allowed. The people who were liaisons between the local Chinese and the foreign traders were seen as being traitors themselves, so the division in society began as it did in India to some degree with training certain Indians, or in this case certain Chinese, to be pseudo colonialists. That is actually something that Rohit and I are writing about. But what I try to do after that is compare the Chinese and the Indian experience, and what it was like. Where the Indians are blind is to class relationships. And with regard to treatment of lower classes. It's not always race per se, but it is class that comes into the Indian context. And in China, it tends to be the treatment of ethnic minority groups by the Han Chinese. Those are some of the things that I do with those primary ethnic groups that constitute my student population.

**GIANA:** Thanks Russ; you use tools of self-reflection to facilitate critical thinking in the classroom. Tonya, would you like to share your perspectives on decolonization and some things that you do in the classroom to help bring out these issues with your students?

**TONYA:** When I present in the classroom, I am often, with my presence, causing discomfort to some and awareness to others. Just that presence is something that I have to introduce to students in a way that they can accept me. I have to have a credentialing experience with the students, so that they actually can listen and take whatever I have to say as valid. That is a very different experience, I would imagine, than any of you have in the classroom. Maybe Rohit if you have something similar, I'm not certain. But that's where we start. And, what ends up happening for me is that I tend to bring in examples from non-majority cultures throughout every lesson. Sometimes students will say things like usually the first week, "I've never seen that." That begets the conversation of 'why do you think you've never seen that? What do you think the purpose of this is?' We do this pretty much every week. By the time we get to segmentation, probably week four, they start to understand these notions of segmentation and what does that really mean. That's when we can start having conversations around what is the implied majority or target consumer, and why is it not spoken of, and everyone else is a segment.

Then we can bring that through all the rest of the class, which can be challenging. The good news is that at UC Irvine, we have a very diverse group of people from around the world. I'm able to bring in things from around the world in a way that allows people to recognize their culture in a positive way. This makes it easier to ask my students to share things that are negative within their culture, or perhaps share things that are uncomfortable to talk about. This can be challenging for people that are from those minority populations. What I don't want to do is have an individual feel as if they have to represent the entire voice of their culture, because that's also uncomfortable. I often will take on that role of representing different voices, or minority voices in other majority cultures. That tends to give people permission to talk about it more. I realized when I was teaching at the University of Notre Dame with primarily white students that when there is the rare minority student talking about their experience, the student could be looked down upon. I never wanted to further "other" people who already felt othered in the classroom experience.

**GIANA:** Tonya, one of the things that Rohit brought up was this idea of being able to create a new vocabulary in the classroom. And introducing new concepts, new ways for people to think and understand how capitalism can be at the root of a lot of this. Do you struggle with that in the classroom, or have any ways in which you try and facilitate that?

**TONYA:** It's always hard when you have your majority students that are saying things like "well, this is how it is." To recast that language and say, for some people, this is the experience of what might be and that there are other experiences too. The dominant view may be "this is the standard and everything else has to measure to that." It's a very careful way to challenge dominant views, and very subtle. By week five, they start understanding that there are different lenses through which to see the world. I love to bring in examples from places like South Africa, or even India, where the majority culture is not white or Anglo. They start to see 'oh wow, okay, this is, this is how this is positioned in another country.' And they're not familiar with those products usually,



or the cultures. It provides opportunities to talk about topics like what makes that positioning possible or makes that market possible. It's really interesting when we speak about capitalism. I know I spent the first 17 years of my career in financial services. And if you think about the basis of financial services and every financial vehicle that we have has its roots in enslaved labor. When you're talking about capitalism, you're basically talking about financial instruments used to enact trade, which are rooted in stolen people's labor. You can bring it up, but again, you have to create an environment where people can embrace that, and it's hard to do in a 50-minute class; you need much more time for that. It has to be nuanced in such a way that, particularly for me as a black woman, I'm not coming to the front of the class saying, "you people did this to my people." Rather, "what might be some of these moral considerations," and "how should we as people working in organizations trying to address wants and needs, how do we consider all of these other facets as well?"

## The future of decolonization in marketing

**GIANA:** I want to follow up with point that Güliz made earlier, "Phil Kotler should be here having this conversation with us." What would make our job easier is if these issues can be brought up in the textbooks that are the standards in business schools around the world. What do we see as the future? Decolonization is something, at least in the discipline of marketing, that is very much at its inception. Most of our colleagues aren't sure what it is, or how to incorporate it into what they're doing. How it fits into their learning goals. How to take consideration of these issues into their research. As awareness of decolonization starts to grow, and hopefully more people do see how and why this would be important, what are some ways that you think that this could be facilitated in the future?

**SUSAN:** I am working on a project where we have developed a framework that we have tested and has been proven to work. It addresses how you introduce these topics into the classroom. We have found in our research that from day one, you encourage what we call a balanced frame of reference. And I think this is what Güliz is doing. At the beginning of her class she'll say, okay, so there's this marketing dilemma, right? So, that there are two sides to the issue that we're discussing today. There's the positive side, but there also is this dark side. And what we found is all the textbooks are all positive. This gets back to the discussion of Kotler. Students are not given a balanced frame of reference. They're given a very rosy frame of reference. Marketing solves problems, and marketing helps with ROI. If you create this environment in your classroom where you're showing both sides, it actually stimulates transformative learning, which is learning with a behavioral intention to change something later on. I encourage people to think about this. Instead of being like, marketing's bad, and then let's talk about marketing. It's more, marketing can have positive and negative consequences. It allows us to start to build on a level of trust with the student, where you're willing to critique marketing, and they're learning that at the beginning. And then you give them the tools to then critique it themselves, which is the third stage, the perspective gathering.

This is a really important process issue. We've talked about three different things, process, content, and structure. All three of those are equally important. Some of us focus on content. Russ is a big content person, his content is structured in a way to bring awareness. And then Güliz is talking in terms of structure. Like okay, I'm going to start the day with this problematizing of a marketing concept. It's important to think about it in those three ways. And my second point is, we need to clean up our own house. I'm getting very annoyed in general with, especially in the Black Lives Matter movement, people making broad declarations. Like Nike donating \$250 million to end systemic racism. But they're not cleaning up their own house. I feel like if we don't clean up our own house, we don't really have any right to go out and talk about de-colonialization. If we don't decolonize our departments, our admin structures, our dean structures, if we don't decolonize ourselves, then it's very difficult to then go forward and talk about the decolonization of marketing. Instead of saying we're going to create content that gives students this balanced perspective, we need to do it ourselves in our own structures.

**TONYA:** I think we have to do a little bit of both though Susan. I appreciate that notion, but what it takes to make our institutions look more like the world is a longer strategy than how do we get the students coming through our institutions to have a broader mindset. We have to do both. The challenge is tapping those people

who might have the good skillset to do it in a way that is not, “this is the cod liver oil they’re making me take.” The reality is not everybody’s going to be capable. We’re having this conversation as if everyone will be equally adept at doing this, and it’s not the case. You know some people are going to have a broader world view than others. Others just aren’t going to care. And there’s some that the comfort of privilege is too great to disrupt.

**RUSS:** One thing that can help is to sneak up on people. The Neill Blomkamp film *District 9* is about a group of aliens from outer space who come – and this is a South African Director – to earth and they’re basically put in these prison camps and treated pretty much like slaves. There are derogatory names for them and so forth. It represents not only the experience of slavery, but the experience of apartheid in South Africa. You’re a third of the way into this film before it dawns on people. Another way I sneak these issues into classes is talking about robot rights. Now that may seem pretty far removed from decolonializing the curriculum, but robots are being used without consent. Sex robots, in sex brothels. There are robots which are particularly made to resist so that the users can reenact their rape fantasy. There are others that are child robots that can enhance pedophilic activity. Because they’re just robots, people will say well, they’re just things. And yet there’s a movement for robot rights right now. There’s a movement against robot slavery. There’s several eloquent spokespeople for these things. But people can talk about these openly and can criticize one another and can argue back and forth. And sometimes sneaking up on people is better than hitting them on the head. So subtle ways like that can work.

**ROHIT:** If I can come in. Going back to the point that Güliz is making about how Kotler has to come in and has to talk about how marketing can be decolonized. As I see it, we can’t really change our classroom conversations without altering or without challenging some of the fundamental structures of knowledge in the discipline. And if you look at the way the discipline is, it suffers from the problem of whiteness, it suffers from the problem of western hegemony, it is completely pro capitalist. And these are some of the very fundamental problems that we need to challenge. Unless we imagine the discipline in a different way, our classrooms are not going to transform. Our classrooms are reflections of how we imagine the discipline.

**GIANA:** Do you have any ideas of how we can start that process of transforming the discipline?

**ROHIT:** Well we need to have more of these conversations. But what I’m trying to say is, these conversations cannot begin in our classrooms. It’s not a matter of how textbooks are framed, it’s a matter of how the entire discipline is framed. It’s a matter of how journal gatekeeping happens, what gets seen as a valid knowledge, who is gatekeeping, how some of those structures of hegemony are existing. Unless we challenge those, I don’t see our pedagogical process changing in isolation.

**GÜLİZ:** I agree, and that’s why I began saying there are things that I can do as an agent, and that there are structures. It’s not that easy to change how you’re doing things, and to change the ways of the business school, unless you deal with the totality of these forces, ideological structures, as well as institutional structures of promotion, grants, the journals you’re going to be publishing in, national and international rankings, evaluation, and accreditation systems. As an academic from the global South, perhaps a fruitful practice is to collaborate and converse with other colleagues from the South. To that end, I have been working with some Brazilian colleagues; see Ger, Suarez, and Nascimento (2019).

**ROHIT:** I completely agree with you Güliz.

**SUSAN:** I don’t want be the token optimist here, because that is certainly not the role I typically play in the world, but I will say, I think of all the disciplines, marketing is the best suited to embrace this, and to really be thought leaders within business schools. I’ve heard that the accounting field is really trying to embrace this, and they’re dedicating a lot of journal space to it. But I think our discipline, by virtue of what we pull from, anthropology, sociology, critical theory, all this that we borrow so much, I think does put us in a better position to be able to address these things versus our colleagues in other departments, except for maybe management.

**TONYA:** I do think it’s an “and” right? There’s the agency part, and there are the structures. I think we really have to challenge our colleagues, even when we’re thinking about who will be admitted to a doctoral program, for example. So we keep talking about diversifying as if there’s people sitting on a shelf somewhere, waiting to take up a faculty position. And we know that’s a four to 6 year process. But, you know, we have to figure out how do we even nurture these people into these programs so we can diversify. If I look at my own degree granting institution at Northwestern, I am one of seven black people that got a PhD in marketing from Northwestern. It’s one of the programs that places a lot of folks in research institutions. There’s only been seven of us. I know all of them. That’s a problem. So those are the kinds of things we have to look at.

**RUSS:** The PhD Project is nice in that regard. And I spoke to it once years ago, and I was the only white guy. But now I've got a mentee, and so I'm glad to see these one-to-one relationships springing up. That's probably more productive ultimately than, forgive me, a bunch of black people talking to each other, even though that mentorship is encouraging, to actually have people from the other side of the academy welcome them and embrace them is an important part of that too.

**GIANA:** I like that we're ending on a note of radical action. Both from our own agency point of view, as well as challenging structures. Thank you all for your insightful and challenging conversation, and your efforts in research, teaching and advocacy to start a dialogue and develop tools to allow our field to start down the path of decolonization.

## Further resources and future research

Below are some links to resources which may be helpful for furthering the decolonization conversation. We hope this is the start of more dialogue, research and teaching initiatives within our field. As emphasized in the introduction to this article, "Business school faculty will always be more comfortable in framing racial injustice, racism, discrimination, Islamophobia and colonialism as diversity and inclusion. It is this comfort zone that decolonization tries to disrupt." (Banerjee 2021). From a marketing perspective, how can we ensure that our research goes beyond framing these issues as diversity and inclusion and breaks out of the comfort zone? How can our classrooms, our hiring practices, our textbooks, and so many other aspects of the marketing discipline go beyond this comfort zone? We hope that our conversation around these issues inspires research, teaching innovations, and advocacy work at the structural level to put together a vision of what decolonized marketing can look like. Is it possible to critique capitalism within marketing, and if so, what would it look like? Ger et al. (2018) highlight the need for critical reflexivity throughout the research process, from selection of topics and approaches onwards, as well as the need to always contextualize market/consumption phenomenon within its political context, if we are to be successful at this.

Decolonization in marketing is in a nascent state, with so much important research to be done. Ger (2018) reminds us we need to expose historical silences, and her curation of intersectionality research in *Journal of Consumer Research* foregrounds the macro context and politics of consumption, crucial for decolonization research. Future research in this space could include how the marketing of slaves has informed modern marketing practices (Francis 2021), how marketing in subsistence marketplaces (Viswanathan et al. 2021) can be engaged in from a bottom up rather than top-down way, and what it could look like with a decolonized lens. Can there be an anti-racist form of marketing (Thomas et al. 2020), and if so, what would it look like? Grier, Thomas, and Johnson (2019) remind us that critical research on race and the marketplace needs to support liberatory public policies and community actions. Taking an intersectional approach to marketing research, which is when multiple dimensions of advertisements or consumers or managers are considered at once, such as race and gender (Golpadas and DeRoy 2015), is especially promising to achieve this. Golpadas and DeRoy (2015) outline how this can be achieved in both quantitative and qualitative research. We look forward to seeing these and other important issues addressed in future marketing and consumption scholarship.

## Decolonization resources

Foundational readings in decolonization, outside of the discipline of marketing, are available here:

<https://www.cass.city.ac.uk/faculties-and-research/centres/cre>

Resources for diversifying the marketing curriculum:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EZitki4NSl6dvdtu3b4MdEzBpqzDaAuO2JcBijtk2T4/edit?pli=1&fbclid=IwAR1PuhKnnf\\_-aul0RYUzt57FdNFPCXHVMtzJphx09vS9X24-DL5U6te8pL8](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EZitki4NSl6dvdtu3b4MdEzBpqzDaAuO2JcBijtk2T4/edit?pli=1&fbclid=IwAR1PuhKnnf_-aul0RYUzt57FdNFPCXHVMtzJphx09vS9X24-DL5U6te8pL8)

Readings on race and the marketplace:

<https://www.rimnetwork.net/rim-repository>

Readings on gender and consumption:

<https://genmacco.wordpress.com/resources/research-guides/research-on-gender/>

Teaching materials on gender:

<https://genmacco.wordpress.com/resources/teaching-innovations>

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

**Giana M. Eckhardt** is Professor of Marketing at King's Business School, King's College London. Her research is in the areas of consumer behavior, consumer culture, consumer ethics, branding, and the sharing economy. She published in outlets including *Harvard Business Review*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, and *Journal of Consumer Research*.

**Russell Belk** is Royal Society of Canada Fellow, York University Distinguished Research Professor, and Kraft Foods Canada Chair in Marketing in the Schulich School of Business, York University. His research involves the extended self, meanings of possessions, collecting, gift-giving, situational effects, sharing, digital consumption, consumer robotics, and materialism, and it is primarily qualitative as well as often conceptual, visual, and cultural. He is the past president and fellow in the Association for Consumer Research and has over 700 publications including more than 30 in *Journal of Consumer Research*.

**Tonya Williams Bradford**, Associate Professor and Inclusive Excellence Term Chair Professor (2021–2024), University of California, Irvine. She researches rituals, communities and identity across phenomenon including gifting (e.g. registry, organ, charitable), relationships with money, communities (e.g. tailgating and support), acculturation, and consumer-brand engagement.

**Susan Dobscha** is Professor of Marketing at Bentley University in Waltham, MA, USA. Her research focuses on sustainability, gender, and transformative leadership. She has published in *Harvard Business Review*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, and *Journal of Marketing Management*.

**Güliz Ger** is Professor of Marketing at Bilkent University, Turkey and a part-time professor/mentor at Skema, France. Her research interests involve the sociocultural and global dimensions of consumption and markets, particularly in transitional societies/groups. She has published in journals such as the *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, *California Management Review*, and in edited books.

**Rohit Varman** is Professor of Marketing and Consumption at Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham. He uses interpretive methodologies and his current inter-disciplinary research focuses on violence, exploitation, and slavery. He has published his research in several outlets that include *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Organization Science*, *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of Service Research*, and *Human Relations*.

## References

Banerjee, S. B. 2021. "Decolonizing Management Theory: A Critical Perspective." *Journal of Management Studies*. doi:10.1111/joms.12756.

- Bannerjee, S. B., Jenny Rodriguez, and Sadhvi Dar. 2020. "Beyond Name Changes and Pulling Down Statues: How to Decolonize Business Schools." *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/beyond-name-changes-and-pulling-down-statues-how-to-decolonise-business-schools-142394>.
- Bhambra, G. K., D. Gebrail, and K. Nişancıoğlu. 2018. *Decolonising the University*. London: Pluto Press.
- Bonsu, Samuel. 2009. "Colonial Images in Global Times: Consumer Interpretations of Africa and Africans in Advertising." *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 12 (1): 1–25.
- Bruce, Norris, Keisha Cutright, Renee Gosline, Jacquelyn Thomas, and Tiffany White. 2020, November 25. "How Business Schools Can Help Corporate America Fight Racism." *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2020/11/how-business-schools-can-help-corporate-america-fight-racism>.
- Burke, Timothy. 1996. *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Burton, Dawn. 2009. "Non-white Readings of Whiteness." *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 12 (4): 349–372.
- Dar, S., H. Liu, A. Martinez Dy, and D. N. Brewis. 2021. "The Business School is Racist: Act Up!" *Organization* 28 (4): 695–706.
- Dirlik, A. 2002. "Rethinking Colonialism: Globalization, Postcolonialism, and the Nation." *Interventions* 4 (3): 428–448.
- Erkmen, T. Deniz. 2018. "Stepping Into the Global: Turkish Professionals, Employment in Transnational Corporations, and Aspiration to Transnational Forms of Cultural Capital." *Current Sociology* 66 (3): 412–430.
- Francis, J. N. P. 2021. "A Macromarketing Call to Action—Because Black Lives Matter!" *Journal of Macromarketing* 41 (1): 132–145.
- Ger, Güliz. 2018. "Research Curation: Intersectional Structuring of Consumption." *Journal of Consumer Research*, Spring 45 (2). <http://hdl.handle.net/11693/50633>.
- Ger, Güliz, Eminegül Karababa, Alev Kuruoğlu, Meltem Türe, Tuba Üstüner, and Baskın Yenicioğlu. 2018. "Debunking the Myths of Global Consumer Culture Literature." In *The Sage Handbook of Consumer Culture*, edited by O. Kravets, P. Maclaran, S. Miles, and A. Venkatesh, 79–101. London: Sage.
- Ger, Güliz, Maribel Carvalho Suarez, and Thaysa Costa do Nascimento. 2019. "Context and Theorizing in the Global South: Challenges and Opportunities for an International Dialogue." *Brazilian Administration Review* 16 (3). doi:10.1590/1807-7692bar2019180069.
- Golpadas, Ahir, and Glenna DeRoy. 2015. "An Intersectional Approach to Diversity Research." *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 18 (4): 333–364.
- Grier, Sonya, Kevin Thomas, and Guillaume Johnson. 2019. "Re-imagining the Marketplace: Addressing Race in Academic Marketing Research." *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 22 (1): 91–100.
- hooks, b. 1989. "Choosing the Margin as Space of Radical Openness." *Framework* 36: 15–23.
- Keele Manifesto for Decolonizing the Curriculum. 2018. <https://www.keele.ac.uk/equalitydiversity/equalityframeworksandactivities/equalityawardsandreports/equalityawards/raceequalitycharter/keeledecolonisingthecurriculumnetwork/#keele-manifesto-for-decolonising-the-curriculum>.
- Kelly, Dara, and Jordan Hrenyk. 2020. "A Call to Decolonize Business Schools, Including Our Own." *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/a-call-to-decolonize-business-schools-including-our-own-145915>.
- Mbembe, J. A. 2002. "African Modes of Self-Writing." *Public Culture* 14 (1): 239–273.
- Poole, Sonja, Sonya Grier, Kevin Thomas, Francesca Sobande, Akon Ekpo, Lez Torres, Lynn Addington, Melinda Weekes-Laidlow, and Geraldine Henderson. 2020. "Operationalizing Critical Race Theory in the Marketplace." *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* 40 (2): 126–142.
- Spivak, G. C. 1999. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Thomas, Kevin, Judy Foster Davis, Jonathan A.J. Wilson, and Francesca Sobande. 2020. "Repetition or Reckoning: Confronting Racism and Racial Dynamics in 2020." *Journal of Marketing Management* 36 (13–14): 1153–1168.
- Varman, R., and I. Al-Amoudi. 2016. "Accumulation Through Derealization: How Corporate Violence Remains Unchecked." *Human Relations* 69 (10): 1909–1935.
- Varman, R., and B. Saha. 2009. "Disciplining the Discipline: Understanding Postcolonial Epistemic Ideology in Marketing." *Journal of Marketing Management* 25 (7–8): 811–824.
- Varman, R., and D. Vijay. 2018. "Dispossessing Vulnerable Consumers: Derealization, Desubjectification, and Violence." *Marketing Theory* 18 (3): 307–326.
- Viswanathan, M., N. Umashankar, A. Sreekumar, and A. Goreczny. 2021. "Marketplace Literacy as a Pathway to a Better World: Evidence from Field Experiments in Low-Access Subsistence Marketplaces." *Journal of Marketing* 85: 113–129.