



Crafting Inclusion through Creative Practice: Decolonising Using Zines

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71957/38nywm94>

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Abstract

Zineing, the creation and distribution of do-it-yourself publications, has risen to newfound pedagogical popularity within the Higher Education contexts of the United Kingdom. From university-based zine libraries—collated by and for the students, public, academic and professional services staff who use them—to the implementation of zineing within teaching, learning, and assessment, the practice has cemented its place as a vital mode of critical creative practice. Initially presented as a 30-minute interactive workshop, this paper explores the rich history and politics of zineing, their relevance to decolonisation initiatives, and their adaptability into an academic workshop format. Reflecting on the zine-practices and decolonial praxis of the authors, this paper calls for a recognition of the decolonial value and potential of zineing within Higher Education.



Introduction

Zines are a not-for-profit, and often at-cost, non-specialist creative activity at the periphery of traditional publishing. Often disseminated as physical booklets, but with a growing online presence in the digital age, zines embody a do-it-yourself (DIY) form and function. From cut-and-paste to hand-drawn, photo-zines, and those made on a computer, the unifying force behind zines is just the passion of their creators. They can be about anything and everything, with no rules nor restrictions to participation.

“Zineing” (Jones, 2024) and its decolonial potential first took shape for the authors through ‘Decolonising Higher Education,’ a research training module co-taught and designed by academic staff and postgraduate researchers at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom. Created by Dr. Sunita Abraham and Dr. Richard Budd, this module seeks to provide students with an insight into decolonisation, a complex political praxis critiquing the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional impacts of “colonialism, empire, and racism” (Bhambra et al., 2018, p.7) on contemporary society, “Higher Education (HE) and doctoral stud[y]” (Abraham et al., 2024, p.3).

In early-2022, Meg Ritchie—a postgraduate researcher in Media and Cultural Studies—enrolled on the module as a student. The content of the sessions heightened her awareness of decolonisation within her research field of Asexuality Studies (Brown, 2022) and the unique cultural hegemony of zines within its canon (Przybyło & Jacob, 2021). When given the opportunity to co-teach on the module from 2023 onwards, she sought to synergise these ideas by designing a zine-making workshop for attendees to critically “imagine and experiment with” (Bartel, 2005, p.5) the praxis of decolonisation and its place within their research. These workshops have led to the production of two e-zines: Decolonising research (Ritchie, 2025b) and decolonising the curricula (Ritchie, 2025a). As co-convenor of the module, these sessions also facilitated Abraham’s introduction to zineing, demonstrating through practice how they enact a non-hierarchical, non-traditional, and creative approach to sharing perspectives on topics with complex histories and legacies.

Zineing as a practice aligns with the authors’ interpretation of decolonisation within HE—facilitating a collaborative “brave space” (Arao & Clemens, 2013) for both students and staff to explore and interrogate contentious subject matter in an inclusive, accessible, and fundamentally creative manner. By centring co-production, teaching,



and learning, it also transforms individuals from “passive consumers [and] into active cultural producers” (Bold, 2017, p.219).

This paper highlights the inclusive nature of this form of critical creative practice and argues for the use of zineing within pedagogy to democratise the production of knowledge within HE. Through discussing the theory and practicalities behind a 30-minute hybrid zine-making workshop on decolonising pedagogy, this paper highlights the decolonial value of zineing in facilitating inclusive teaching and learning practices.

“Defining” zineing and its decolonial histories

Though the value of the active and embodied process of zineing—the production, distribution, and small-circulation of do-it-yourself, tangible ‘forms of sociability’ (Radway, 2012, p.40)—has an ever-increasing legitimacy within both academic circles (Bold, 2017; Duncombe, 2008; Jones, 2024; Piepmeier, 2008) and pedagogical practice (Armstrong, 2025; Bagelman & Bagelman, 2016; Bartel, 2005; Scheper, 2023; Thomas & Nuñez-Janes, 2025; Tinio & Chomintra, 2024), the exact nature of the zine remains elusive. Many researchers writing around zines often feel it necessary to begin with a definition of zines—an attempt at answering “what are they?” (Duncombe, 2008, p.6)—whilst others (Bold, 2017) refuse to engage in definitions at all, assuming a degree of knowledge on part of the reader. The reasoning behind this is that most attempts to “classify and codify” (Duncombe, 2008, p.15) the practice fall short as zines themselves “deliberately lack cohesion of form and function” (Bartel, 2005, p.2). A zine can be created individually or as a community. It can be a cut-and-paste artefact which borrows images and text from other mediums, completely hand-drawn, or digitally created. It can even feature little to no images at all, expressing itself simply through the written word. The only thing seemingly uniting zines is their identification as one (Arnold, 2016).

As such, as both Daniel P. Jones (2024) and Janice Radway (2012) argue, it is important to recognise zines not as a product but as a process. From 1930s science-fiction fanzines to the DIY ethos of the punk and riot grrrl movements, zineing has always been rooted in a long history of countercultural production and sociopolitical activism. Zinesters, those who create and distribute zines, use their practice to “articulate [...] the problems of the[ir] present cultural, economic and political system” (Duncombe, 2008, p.9), unbound by the restrictions of traditional publishing. Regardless of content or



style therein, zines both offer and represent a subversive symbol of anti-institution publishing and a counter to dominator culture (Tinio & Chomintra, 2024), providing an informal record of personal experience which can incite action. By allowing for the use of non-traditional or non-Western formats and content, and by providing the space to draw on insights from Indigenous and other Global South perspectives, zines can help to decolonise knowledge production and dissemination. In centring art and creativity as the main mode of communication over traditional text-based formats and the use of specialist jargon often found within Eurocentric academic works, zineing emblemises a non-hierarchical and non-traditional format that is uniquely accessible and distinctly decolonial.

Zineing as decolonial pedagogy

Zineing has risen to newfound popularity as an alternative and fundamentally decolonial pedagogical practice within the UK and beyond. From university-based zine libraries which radically “tak[e] up space” (Scheper, 2023, p.25) within the academy, zine-making spaces (see University of Salford, 2025), and the utilisation of zineing within teaching and assessment (Scheper, 2023; Thomas & Nuñez-Janes, 2025), zineing has become a valuable tool to reshape the banking concept of learning (Freire, 2005) into that of educational liberation (hooks, 1994). This co-creation of learning transforms the rules and expectations of the colonial classroom into a “radical space of possibility” (ibid., p.12) which enables an engaged, democratised, and decolonial pedagogy.

In the current political climate, with ongoing cuts to the arts and humanities, and concerns that “legislative attacks against Critical Race Theory [...], Diversity Equity and Inclusion [...], and LGBTQ+ students” (Thomas & Nuñez-Janes, 2025, p.141), rights in the United States will affect the pedagogical practices of the UK (Marshall, 2025). Thus, considerations into the restorative, decolonial power of practices like zineing for HE are more important than ever.

Nevertheless, despite zineing being acknowledged as an inclusive and participatory practice (Duncombe, 2008; Scheper, 2023; Thomas & Nuñez-Janes, 2025; Tinio & Chomintra, 2024), scholarship considering their value in teaching decolonisation, insomuch that decolonisation can be taught, is limited. However, zineing itself has begun to foster this conversation. As part of their ongoing decolonial work, the



University of the Arts London invited staff and students to contribute to a zine on 'Decolonising the Arts Curriculum,' opening up an "interpretive [decolonial] space [...] about decolonisation" (emphasis added, Patel & Panesar, 2019, para.3) rather than a didactic *on* decolonisation. Examples like this highlight how zines and zineing workshops can open up a valuable space to foster conversations around decolonisation within HE.

Workshopping decolonisation

Collectively, the authors have facilitated seven zineing workshops in various contexts—from academic seminars, casual drop-in sessions, conferences, symposiums, and research culture exhibitions—with sessions lasting anywhere from 30-minutes to four hours. These workshops have been experienced by a wide range of HE practitioners from undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research students to academics, and professional services staff. In addition, they have been conducted both in-person and in hybrid formats.

Like the elusive nature of zineing itself, these workshops have a great degree of freedom in relation to how they are presented and often build on previous iterations. Nevertheless, each workshop tends to use the following structure:

- In the advertised description of the workshop, the authors encourage attendees to critically think about their research, teaching or learning practices and their current relationship to decolonisation prior to the session. They are informed that they can come to the workshop with any materials they would like to use for their zine. Furthermore, they are provided with a series of decolonised writing provocations (Kilomba, 2008; Smith, 1999; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021) to spark their creativity and critical thought.
- The workshop begins with introductions from facilitators and attendees. During this, attendees are asked what they already know of zineing or what they hope to learn and experience from the workshop to gauge their prior knowledge of the practice and their understanding of decolonisation.
- Following this, the facilitators deliver a brief presentation explaining what a zine is, what decolonisation is, and how the two are intrinsically linked.



- After this, participants engage in a hands-on zineing session, with cut-and-paste materials provided. Attendees are encouraged to present the zine in whichever format they feel most comfortable—creating a single zine-page or a short zine booklet. More so, attendees are made aware of the various approaches to zineing they can take beyond cut-and-paste, such as freewriting, hand-drawn illustration, or digital zines (if they have access to a computer or personal device). Whilst the zines are being created, the facilitators will walk around the room, asking participants about their creations to further foster their critical-creative practice.
- Finally, shortly before the workshop ends or, in the case of drop-in sessions, when attendees have to leave, each zinester is encouraged to share their zine and the meanings they were trying to convey behind it. Then, with their permission, zines are either collected or digitally scanned so that they can contribute to a future zine volume which will be edited by the authors.

With their casual, collaborative nature, the zineing workshops give participants the freedom to explore their personal relationship with decolonisation without the pressures of assessment or saying something wrong. In centring the zineing workshop as a brave space, participants can openly discuss decolonisation within HE—sharing their understanding, opinions, and feelings towards the topic, alongside their lived experience, in a dialogue of “[c]ontroversy with civility” (emphasis in original, Astin & Astin, 1996, p.59 in Arao & Clemens, 2013, p.144) whilst they create. Once the workshop has finished, participants can take the knowledge from this experience with them, leaving their zine-page or zine booklet behind for future readers “to develop [their] own [...] meanings” (Thomas & Nuñez-Janes, 2025, p.148) of decolonisation from what was created. For this reason—in-line with the idea that the best manner to understand the zine is “show-and-tell” (Bartel, 2005, p.1) and with permission from their creators—the authors invite readers to view select zine-pages from the workshop this paper is based upon (Figures 1, 2 and 3) so that they can consider what decolonisation within HE could mean to them in turn.



Figure 1: Zine-page from Lancaster University Education Conference 2025





Figure 2: Zine-page from Lancaster University Education Conference 2025

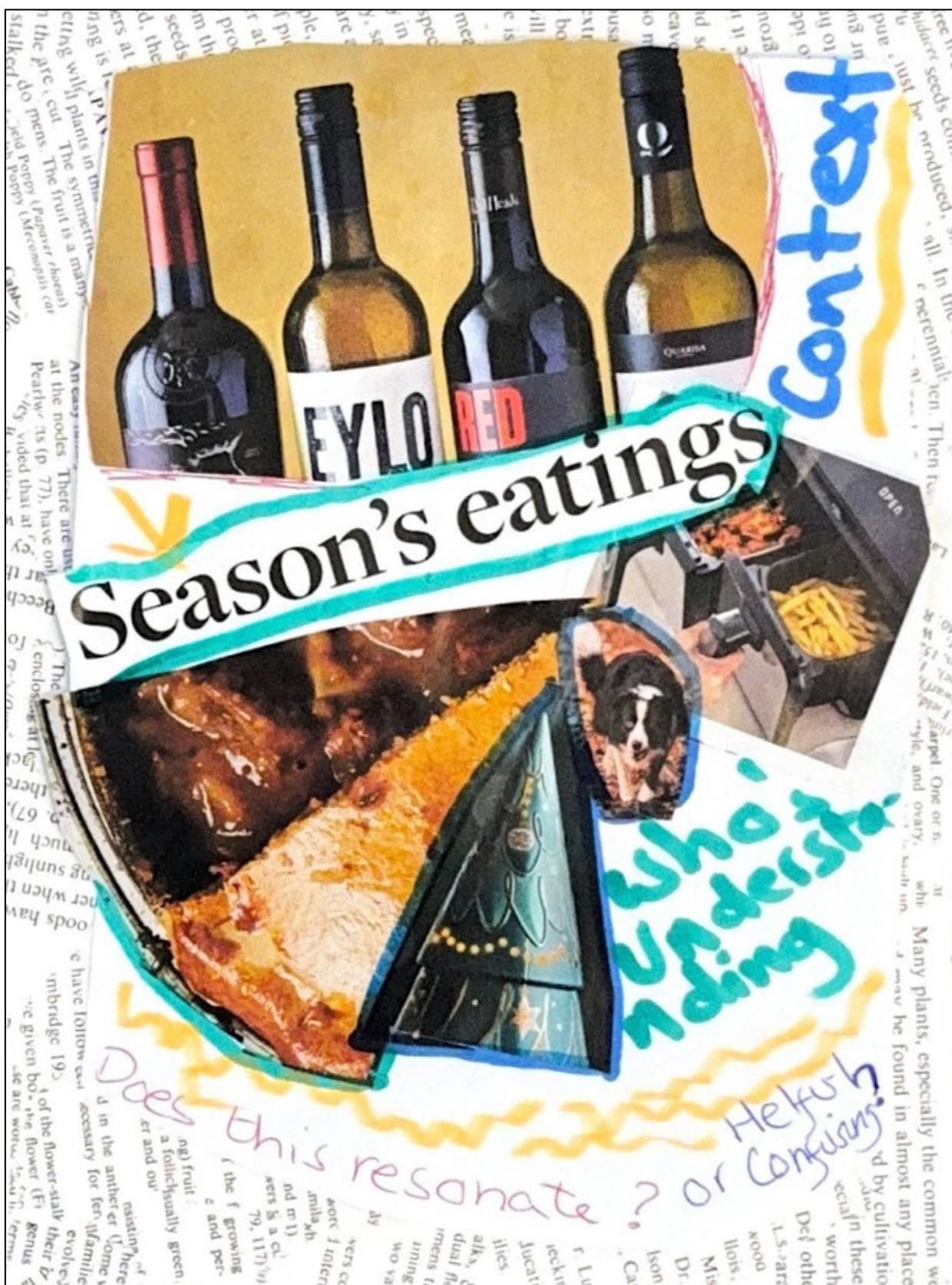
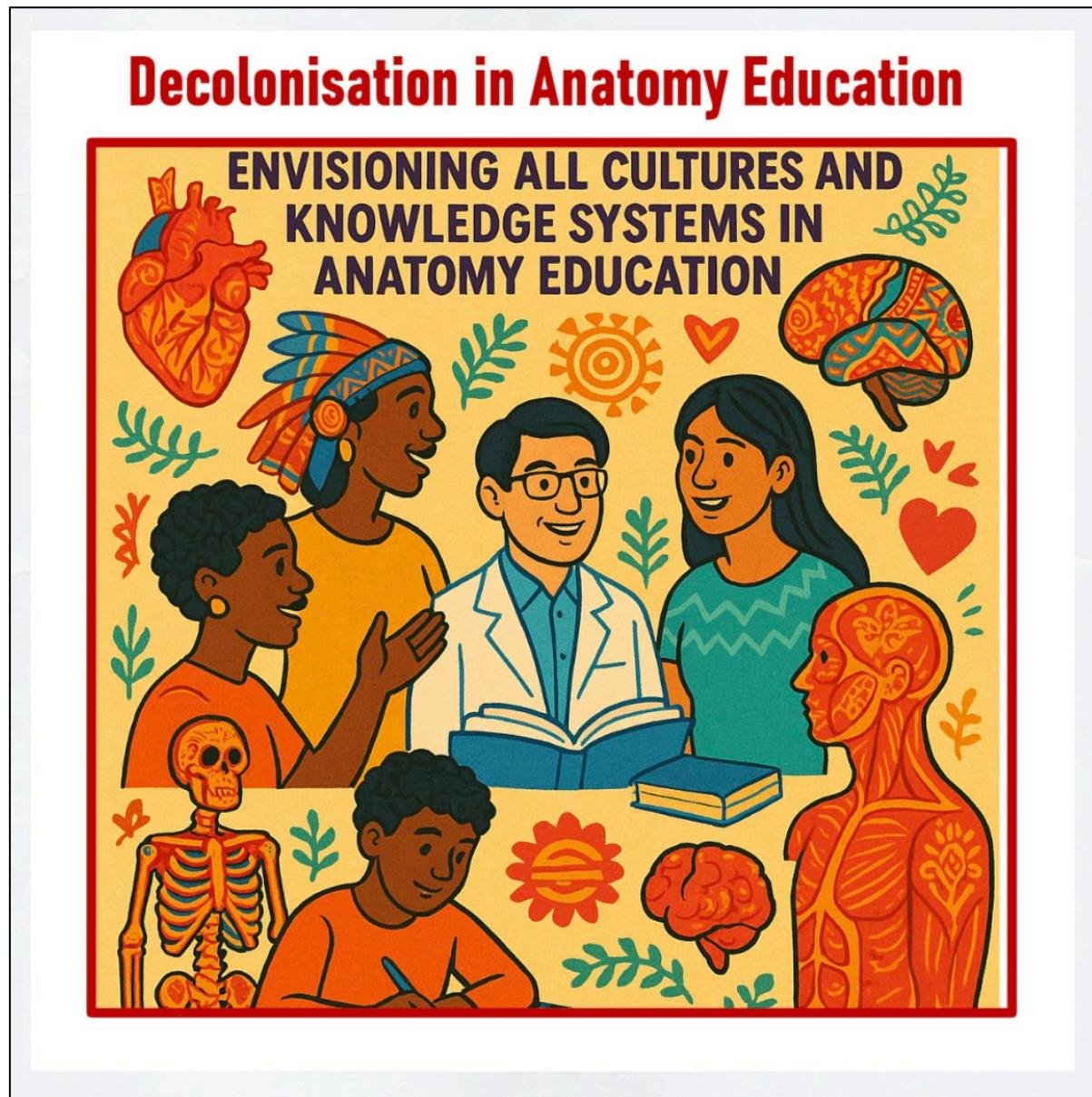




Figure 3: Zine-page from Lancaster University Education Conference 2025



Reflection

The authors have gained valuable insights from the various workshops they have facilitated, including this one. To date, this was the shortest zine-making session the authors had attempted to facilitate, only allowing for 20-minutes of hands-on zineing. As such, before the workshop took place, the authors were concerned about whether there would be enough time to generate an output and whether it would be enough for participants to have a taste of its potential. Nevertheless, there was good engagement from the attendees and all managed to create a single zine-page before the session concluded.



Regarding difficulties, only two moments from the session stood out for the authors. In the first case, one attendee was uncomfortable about sharing their zine-page at the end of the workshop and did not wish to include their work in a future publication. They cited that they had misunderstood what the session was about and did not think that their page was very good. Though the authors try to cement in the introduction to each workshop that participants do not need to be artists to take part in zineing, we recognise and respect that this hurdle—an atypical presentation of knowledge which goes beyond what is normally expected within HE—can be difficult to overcome. As such, due to this experience, the authors have sought to emphasise to participants in all ~~future~~ subsequent workshops that it is the *process* not the *product* of zineing that we are wishing to demonstrate the value of. Focusing on the zine as a product—especially within the academy—has the potential to turn zineing into a “celebratory tool” which “coopt[s] and tame[s]” (Jones, 2024, p.418) the inherent decoloniality of the practice itself.

The second case relates to the single workshop participant who attended online. Though the authors have experience with online attendees, this was the first instance of a participant using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create their zine-page (Figure 3). Decolonisation initiatives and HE more broadly have a fraught relationship with the use of AI. In this, the question of whether AI should be used—and in what manner—within HE (Bearman et al., 2022) and “what [...] AI mean[s] because of colonialism” (emphasis in original Adams, 2021, p.178) are still up for extensive debate. However, there are similar debates arguing for the use of AI within decolonisation initiatives and pedagogy. Here, AI has been utilised in the revitalisation of Indigenous languages (Heidt, 2025) and as a democratising tool in the production of knowledge within academia (The Quality Assurance Agency, 2024). As such, though an unexpected outcome, this zine-page has prompted the authors to rethink how zineing can be actualised within the digital age and why we must remain both open and critically conscious of new developments within HE and culture more broadly.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates the values of zineing within HE as a tool to both critically practice and explore decolonisation. In embracing the histories of zineing as a countercultural, sociopolitical, and inherently decolonial practice, this paper



demonstrates how zineing can transform the HE classroom into a co-learning space. By foregrounding the exploration and sharing of personal experience, zineing works to democratise the academic landscape, fostering a vital space to consider and critique what and whose knowledge is considered valuable within the academy as it currently stands.

The authors intend to continue facilitating zineing workshops within Lancaster University, providing more students and staff with the ability to critically practice zine-making and consider its relevance to their teaching, learning, assessment, and research practices. In addition, the authors are actively encouraging previous participants who have felt inspired by the workshop to establish their own zine-making networks. As a result of this, one of the authors (Ritchie) has recently co-facilitated a zineing workshop for human geographers at Lancaster University. That workshop was organised by a postgraduate researcher who had previously attended the Decolonising Higher Education module. This link highlights the synergies between teaching and learning practices in both zine-making and research training content relating to decolonisation. Overall, the authors' main hope beyond these workshops is to one day establish a zine-making space and library at Lancaster University, offering a permanent brave space for students, staff, and the public to engage in the active, embodied, and decolonial process of zineing.

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