



# FEELING SEEN

STUDENTS FILLING  
GAPS IN  
DECOLONIZATION



HELLO!  
MY NAME IS  
SARAH  
AKHTARUZZAMAN

- Academic Support Librarian at University of Warwick
- Not an expert in decolonization! However it does affect me:
  - ...as a person of colour.
  - ...as an immigrant to the UK.
  - ...as a gay woman.
- Intersectionality doesn't stop there:
  - I am German.
  - I am white-passing.
  - I am culturally white.

# DECOLONIZATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

- Student and staff demographics:
  - Staff: In 2022/23, 20.7% of staff are Black, Asian, or minority ethnic (18% of UK population is non-white/minority ethnic)
  - Students: In 2022/23, 53.3% of Warwick students are Black, Asian, or minority ethnic.
  - Black students: 8.2% undergraduate, 5.2% postgraduate. (4% nationally)

# DECOLONIZATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

- Decolonization is part of the discourse at University of Warwick:
  - Handbooks, websites, presentations
  - Schools most commonly mentioning decolonization include (but are not limited to): School of Modern Languages and Cultures (SMLC), History, English & Comparative Studies, Theatre and Performance Studies, and Interdisciplinary Methodologies
  - Decolonization project at the library

# DECOLONIZATION IN SMLC

*The School of Modern Languages and Cultures is committed to creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment. We believe that this endeavour is crucial to maximising creativity and innovation in education and research within the School.*

## Our Values

- Making anti-racism, religious tolerance, anti-sexism, and anti-bigotry central to a culture of excellence in the School
- Valuing differences in others and the contribution they make
- Working and studying within the University on a co-operative basis
- Demonstrating a commitment to upholding the University's policies on [Equality, Diversity & Inclusion](#)

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Forum

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/socialinclusion/>

# DECOLONIZATION IN SMLC

## Current Projects and Initiatives in SMLC

- **Student Network.** A team of student coordinators engages groups of students in the following areas: widening participation, Black students, LGBTQI+ students, and disabled students.
- **Staff Pedagogy Reading Group.** Meets twice per term to discuss issues relating to pedagogy. Readings have included topics on gender, decolonising the curriculum, pedagogical inclusivity, student wellbeing, and cultural insight.
- **Support for those who have fled the war in Ukraine.** Our Russian language team initiated contact with a local Ukrainian refugee community to offer multilingual support. Warwick students in higher level Russian classes are helping Ukrainian refugees to develop their English language skills. One of our Russian tutors works with a more advanced group, using their prior experience as an ESOL teacher to facilitate discussions and exchanges. Along with the University, the SMLC [stands with Ukraine](#).

Many of our SMLC research [seminars](#), workshops, conferences, and [modules](#) engage with ED&I as a central feature of cultural and linguistic contact.

# THE STUDENTS' STATEMENT

Greetings everyone. My name is Maria Mallett and I am a coordinator of the Black Student Network of the SMLC. Whilst I could not be here in person, I am thrilled to briefly discuss a project that I led in pursuit of more inclusive education for BSN members but which has developed over time — a BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) student-led reading list for all those who may feel alienated and disengaged from current academic content.

Feedback from BSN members at the beginning of the year rated their academic experience as negative to neutral, with many finding themselves as the sole representative of their ethnicity in lectures and seminars, leading to two overwhelming responses: either a sense of isolation where they “happen to be the only black individual in most of [their] lectures and seminars” or a feeling of hypervisibility “when [lecturers] expect [them] to answer a topic about black people because [they’re] black.”.

In order to address these concerns and create environments where all students feel a sense of belonging with the SMLC community, the mission of this reading list was to provide a decolonised range of empowering narratives to make up for the lack of relatable and contemporary explorations in the university curriculum. Narratives based around triumph over struggle or activism against injustice have been exhausted and can be triggering. It is the hope that this reading list ensures that students can see themselves reflected in literature that embraces their multifaceted experiences, identities, values and aspirations.

This endeavour was not a solitary effort, but a combined undertaking that involved valuable contributions and suggestions from BSN members, the university library and the Warwick Latin American Society. With the active participation of students in the process of selecting books, we hope that the reading list has become a comprehensive resource that authentically reflects a plethora of intersectional voices and perspectives.

# THE STUDENTS' STATEMENT

The authors featured in this reading list represent a diverse array of countries, including Equatorial Guinea, China, Haiti, Korea, Iran, and India. The POC reading list itself focuses on the four main languages of Spanish, Italian, French, and German, offering a selection of literary works in a variety of genres catering to different interests, preferences and reading levels. From fiction to nonfiction, poems to graphic novels, the reading list offers a collection of writings that explore a broad spectrum of themes. The themes go beyond traditional boundaries, incorporating LGBTQ+ experiences, the world of superheroes, and delving into captivating subjects such as Afrofuturism.

The response to the POC reading list has been resoundingly positive by both students and staff which speaks volumes about the immeasurable value that it holds and the gap it is filling in the SMLC community. Already the list has ignited a spark of enthusiasm and creativity, where ideas are already being nurtured to expand the reach and application of this invaluable resource, extending its influence far beyond its initial intentions.

But this initiative does not end here; it is a seed that has been planted with the intention to grow and flourish. The reading list exemplifies the power of the collaborative spirit, the importance of representation, and the transformative potential of inclusive education. In the future, it will constantly develop and expand, welcoming new voices and narratives that inspire, educate, and empower. Through this ongoing process of enrichment, I hope to leave a lasting legacy of inclusivity and representation. May this serve as the first of many accomplishments in the university's journey toward fostering an inclusive and supportive academic environment.



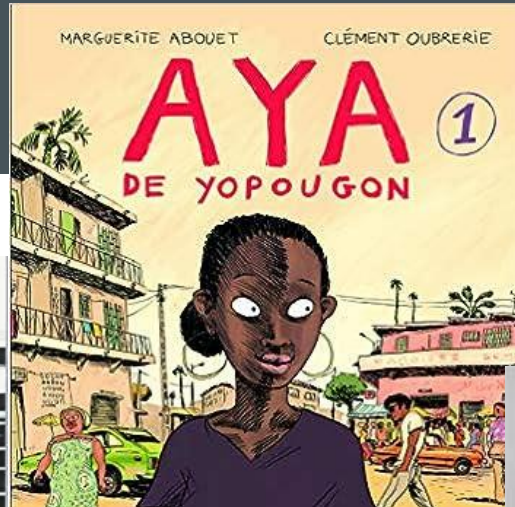
# THE READING LIST PROJECT

- Proposed project: A reading list with books written by black authors in the four main languages taught in SMLC: French, Spanish, German, Italian
- 10 titles per language
- Various levels of difficulty for different levels of proficiency
- Books to be bought from the Decolonizing budget at University of Warwick library
- NOT an attempt to replace assigned reading

# CRITERIA

- Originally written in non-English language
- Black authors only
- Exclusion of some controversial authors (e.g. history of alleged sexual assault)
- **Relatable to black students**

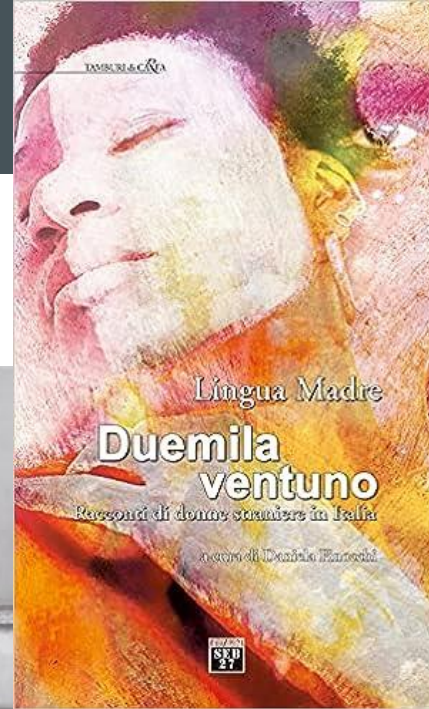
# TITLES



Elisa Shua  
Dusapin  
Les Billes  
du Pachinko

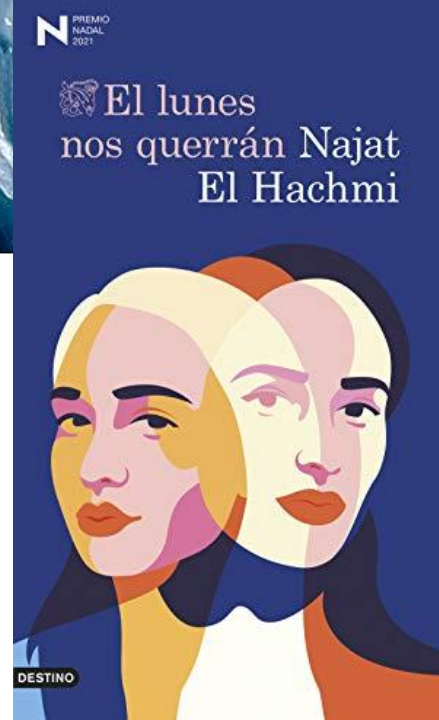
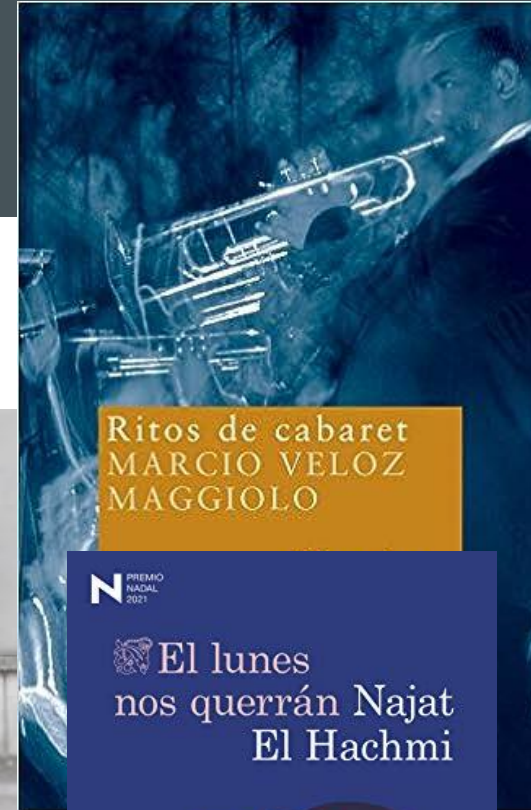


ZOE



Max Mauro  
La mia casa  
è dove sono  
felice  
Storie di emigrati e immigrati

KAPPA VU



btb

MELANIE RAABE

DIE  
FALLE

Thriller

# MAKING IT OFFICIAL

- Discussions with the BSN leaders brought to light a disconnect between the School's efforts and the students' experience
  - Number of BSN members is low, and numbers of black students in SMLC is low as well
  - Feelings of both isolation and hypervisibility
  - Readings on Black issues were perceived as one dimensional
- ➔ Proposal to bring this disconnect to department's attention

# MOVING FORWARD

- Head of School was very receptive!
- Statement will be taken to School Management meetings
- Statement will also be presented at Department meeting
- Plans for further staff training
- Plans for further awareness training for students
- Work with BSN to promote reading list through author talks, awareness events, reading groups...

# TAKEAWAYS

- Decolonization is not a linear process
- Creating lines of communications is important
- ...so is maintaining the lines of communication (continuity!)
- Not everyone will agree!
- Listening to minority voices  $\neq$  leaning on members of minorities
- Be ready for criticism
- Be ready to change

THANK YOU!

- Any questions?