Decolonising Media Studies (DeMS) – List of Requirements

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This CLARIAH Teaching Fellowship project focused on the benefits of using the Media Suite in a decolonial classroom with the purpose of supporting decolonial pedagogy. In the scope of this project, a decolonial classroom is defined as a safe learning environment where students, assistants, and teachers engage in a collective learning experience in a non-hierarchical, non-individualistic, non-competitive setting that supports collective work, mutual respect, intellectual enrichment and empowerment, and a critical awareness of global imbalance in the production of knowledge (i.e. latent structures of power benefiting white, heterosexual, male, abled body as the unfailing subject of knowledge production). In this setting, Media Suite stood out as a helpful tool to conduct critical discourse analysis of race-related topics in the media as well as media archives. In the scope of Decolonising Media Studies (DeMS) elective, Media Suite assignment was thus an important part of the course.

DeMS is an elective offered by Humanities Faculty. It was launched in the academic year of 2021-2022. This means that the teachers and students of its first edition had the chance to experiment with the Media Suite in line with the learning goals of the elective. On many levels, Media Suite presented valuable opportunities for a decolonial classroom, however, its potential ranges beyond such a learning environment, for example, to more classical pedagogical settings. In the context of growing awareness and practices of decolonising the education, Media Suite surely presents promising directions for classroom use. Below, I would like to elaborate on some of the challenges that we came across in the implementation of the project. I believe these suggestions might give some insight into the concrete issues that arose in the classroom exercises, and eventually increase the potentials of Media Suite in a decolonial classroom setting.

The following section lists requirement suggestions that address the specific challenges encountered in the implementation of the project in this particular setting.

Requirement suggestion 1: Query Design Tutorial

The first challenge encountered in the implementation of the project was *interdisciplinarity* and this was primarily an outcome of the university's elective policy. At the University of

Amsterdam, the electives are offered faculty wide. This gives students freedom to choose any elective regardless of their host programme. While this allows students to follow an elective in a topic that they are interested in, as well as making the classroom a diverse and interdisciplinary environment, in the specific case of DeMS it presented several difficulties.

Primarily, students were not readily familiar with media analysis methods. Even the most basic skills of formal analysis, which every student of Media Studies learns in their freshman year as a pre-requisite to further their studies, were lacking in some members of the class. This made it sometimes difficult to adhere to the project description, which envisioned a critical discourse analysis of media coverage (of a specific topic). For example, some relevant research questions, or points of entry for a critical analysis, were suggested in the project description as follows: Is there latent bias towards people of colour in the (chosen) media? Is there self-representation of subordinated or marginalised communities in these discussions? Who are the main actors that influence public opinion in these debates? How is the visual language constructed around these topics, and how may a formal analysis of mise-en-scène, narration, and editing help elucidating (discursive) constructions of visual language? Only a limited number of media students could engage with such questions. Others needed a quick introduction to where to begin with a search in the Media Suite, and how to develop a research question that will help critically analyse the chosen media coverage.

However, the classroom was eventually quite a welcome mix of disciplines, with students coming from as diverse programmes as political science, religion, sociology, communication science, among others. These students brought interesting insights into the discussion of decolonisation as a topic. But they had difficulty to navigate the Media Suite. In my feedback sessions, I realised that quite a few students were not familiar with archives. They had no experience or understanding of archival research. On this point, one question that came up in these sessions was quite emblematic: A student asked how Media Suite is different than YouTube, and if they cannot "just find the same video on YouTube." Following this, it was productive to have a discussion on the ways in which YouTube functions / doesn't function as an archive. Plus, we talked about other functionalities that Media Suite incorporates to facilitate digital-humanities-informed scholarly research, as well as the research questions that these functionalities enable.

These two instances show that students were intimidated *to start* exploring the Media Suite. I believe this reveals more an anxiety about *how to start searching/navigating the collections* rather than a user-friendly interface. The Search functionality came to the fore as being 'not easiest' or straightforward to use. I believe a **Query Design Tutorial** might be useful to address such confusions and improve the user's experience of Search functionality. Such a query tutorial would ensure that the user gets most of the Media Suite at Search stage.

Requirement suggestion 2: Language diversity

The DeMS classroom was exceptionally international, with students coming from a wide range of nationalities (such as Greek, Polish, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Kazak, Lebanese, South African) and mixed cultural backgrounds (such as Hindustani-Dutch, Mexican-Spanish, Greek-Flemish, Turkish-American, Chinese-American among others). In this fascinating diversity, only 2 students (out of 27) spoke Dutch.

In CLARIAH Media Suite Teaching / Research Fellowship gatherings, a few colleagues who had experience with using the Media Suite in international classrooms touched upon the challenges for non-Dutch-speaking students before. One solution proposed by the colleagues was to include at least one Dutch speaker in assignment groups. However, the solutions suggested and discussed in those gatherings were not applicable in the specific case of DeMS. Initially, most students felt intimidated by the language barrier and moved away from the Media Suite project. In the end, there were two groups (out of 6) working on Media Suite projects, and there was one Dutch speaking student in both groups. However, this affected the group dynamic sometimes in negative ways, as other students felt excluded or disconnected from the work. Surely this is not strictly and only the outcome of Media Suite, it's a challenge that needs to be addressed at a wider context of collective working culture of students. In a standard pedagogical system, students learn to perform individually in a competitive environment. It takes a longer time to shed these habits aside and learn to collaborate collectively, equally, and respectfully on a shared outcome. Such cultural shift doesn't happen overnight, and many students bring such habitual values into a decolonial classroom setting too.

To overcome the difficulties non-Dutch-speaking students faced when working with Media Suite, I advised them to expand their research to *other* media (for example, silent

films or image-based collections) to strengthen/contribute to the cross-media aspect of the assignment. However, this solution also had its own limitations. It resulted in the fact that Media Suite (findings) were not anymore the centre focus or the main component of the assignment; they were supportive findings.

To address the challenges of language diversity, I have a few suggestions. First, a tutorial on working with *image-based collections* (such as Desmet Poster Collection) for users that do not speak Dutch could be an enriching option to take the best out of Media Suite collections. Second, ensuring better visibility of other languages in the Media Suite collections. For example, in my own research, I did come across Turkish-language items in Sound and Vision collections. Perhaps **Curated Playlist(s) shedding light on other languages** could be one way to show the language diversity of the collections accessible via Media Suite. Similarly, **a tutorial on working with / accessing other languages in the collections** could address this issue. Finally, following from the previous suggestion on Query Design, better explaining which queries, functionalities, tools can be used to excavate and access non-Dutch items. For example, are these languages marked in Dutch (e.g. Turkish-language television programmes are marked as 'Turkse Uitzending'), or are there any words in the metadata in that language (again, staying with the same example, is it possible to type in query words in Turkish? Can you or should you use Turkish letters? Are there any non-Dutch words in the metadata)? Can ASR tool recognise languages other than Dutch?

Requirement suggestion 3: Shared project space

Since a non-hierarchical and collective learning environment was key for DeMS elective, this teaching fellowship project would benefit from **a shared project space** where users would be able to work together and simultaneously on their common project. Not being able to work collectively on a shared project links with the issue of group dynamics that I mentioned earlier. On many levels, a shared project space would enrich the potentials of Media Suite immensely – not only for teaching context, for example by allowing group projects, but also for scholarly research.