



MA in Human Geography and Sustainability Research
GEG-40026 Dissertation

**Decolonising Keele: an exploration of the perceptions and barriers to the university-
led implementation of Decolonising the Curriculum**

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Abstract

University-led approaches to DTC are taking root in UK Higher Education. As part of this, strategies to decolonise and co-produce this change with students are emerging from these institutions. In 2020, Keele university made an institutional commitment to DTC. This research explores the structures and barriers that DTC must navigate and focuses on the student perceptions in exacting this change.

This research draws on decolonial epistemologies to inform the methods, data collection and analysis. This study utilised reflexive diaries and semi-structured interviews with five student participants and four expert participants at Keele. Early findings from this research were presented to the DTC faculty workshops at Keele (May 2022). The staff response and the researcher's reflections were then used to inform the structure of focus group with the student participants.

The perceptions and understandings of DTC at Keele are exposed within this research. The data highlighted that there are contested and conflating understandings of what decolonial progress and change should look like in the university. There was also widespread pessimism about the university's motivation to decolonise. Student collaboration was explored, unveiling that student participants do not feel they have much power or ability to co-produce DTC. This research also highlighted the intersection between DTC and race at Keele. Participants shared their experiences of marginalisation and not feeling represented in the curricula. This was also noted as a motivating factor to participate in DTC work.

This research can be utilised to inform DTC practice at Keele in the future. It exposes the weaknesses and strengths in the university-led approach to decolonising. The student voice is central to this research and provides a legitimate space for their experiences and hopes to be articulated.

Student Declaration

No part of this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for any degree or qualification of the Keele University or any other University or Institute of learning.

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Glossary

DTC – Decolonising the Curriculum

HE – Higher Education

DKN – Decolonising Keele Network

SSVC – Student Star Voice Committee

BAME – Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic

EDI – Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

REC – Race Equality Charter

HR – Human Resources

SU – Student Union

NUS – National Union of Students

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Figure 1. Timeline of DTC milestones at Keele University. Page 2.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The introduction of this dissertation consists of background information about Keele's relationship with DTC, which justifies its use as a case study for this research. The researcher's positionality and motivations for undertaking this research are integral in decolonial methodologies and are shared as reflexivity. The literature review covers four main areas that situate the research project in the wider academic literature: 1) Broader decolonisation; 2) Institutional power and knowledge; 3) Decolonising the Curriculum in Higher Education; and 4) UK higher education context. The Methods section will briefly summarise the methods utilised in this research, followed by the Methodology which demonstrates the reasoning for the decolonial methodological approach and methods selected for this research. Next, the main body of the discussion, which is composed of researcher reflexivity on the presentation of the findings, and the 5 themes of analysis: 1) Change; 2) Barriers; 3) Institutional power; 4) Student power; and 5) Race and DTC. Finally, this dissertation concludes with the researcher's reflections on producing this research and final remarks on the findings.

Keele's relationship with decolonisation has been complex, from its emergence as a grassroots campaign to an institutionally driven attempt. Keele's DTC journey started in 2018 (see Figure 1 for a timeline) through the Decolonising Keele Network: a grassroots, student-led initiative. They questioned 'why is my curriculum so white?' and continued campaigning against Keele's eurocentric and marginalising curriculum until 2020. An amalgamation of Covid19, key student members graduating, and institutional pressure led to the DKN being side-lined (Anon, 2020). Later in 2020, Keele university formally adopted a university-wide decolonising programme. Whilst members of DKN suggest that this resulted from their years of campaigning, it is more likely a result of Keele's aspirations for achieving a silver REC. July 2020 marks the first institutionally wide DTC event and, from there, Keele university has demonstrated a commitment to decolonising its curriculum. In the last year, there has been more progress in the endeavour, from curriculum design changes to this student-led research.

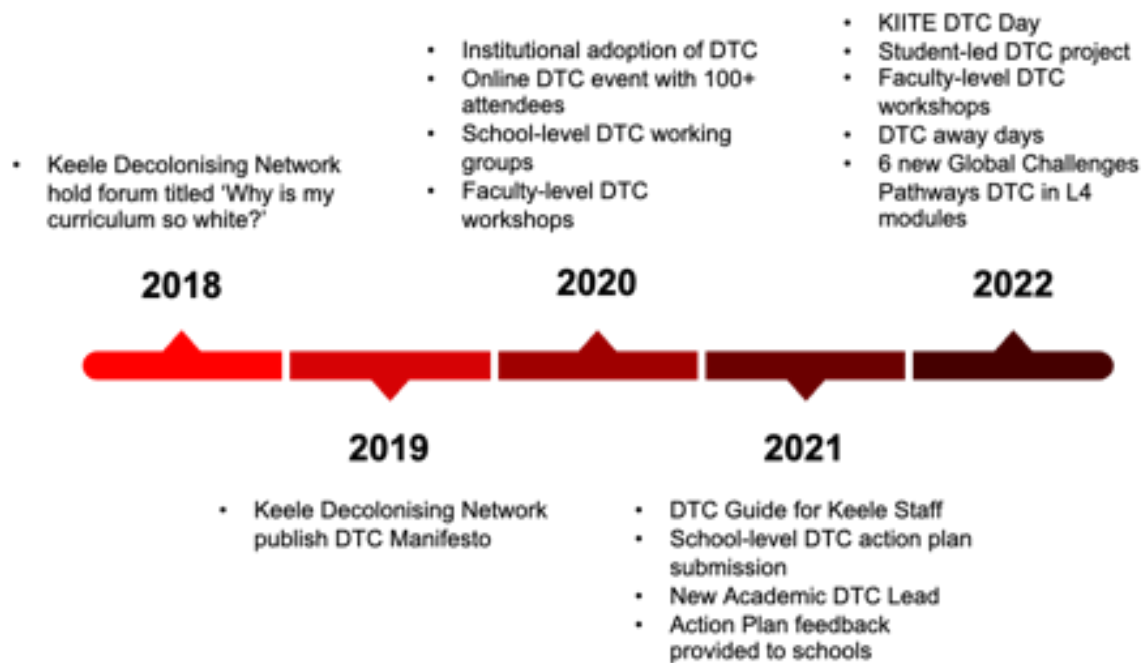


Figure 1. Timeline of DTC milestones at Keele University.

Student collaboration in DTC is one of the central tenets of this initiative, yet student perspectives on institutionally driven decolonisation are largely under-researched (Shahjahan et al., 2022; Bhabra et al., 2018). This research is uniquely placed to centre the student voice, perspective, and experiences of DTC at Keele. Drawing on a quotation from Phipps and McDonnell (2021) “‘Improvement’ is one of the master’s tools, implying that the university is broken rather than functioning exactly as designed. There is a paradox here: how can the institution be made more equal, considering what it is for?” (p516). This research will explore how attempts to decolonise the curriculum at Keele University are perceived by the students involved in the works. While DTC aims to make the university and curriculums more inclusive, there is concern that university institutions cannot undo and unlearn the coloniality that created them (Mbembe, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Based on such concerns, this research aims to:

- explore the current state of DTC at Keele university;
- explore student perceptions of co-producing DTC at Keele;
- explore the barriers to DTC work at Keele university; and
- elicit decolonised knowledge of DTC at Keele utilising decolonial methodologies.

1.2. Positionality and motivations

To accomplish the aims of the master's dissertation, I realised that I would have to engage in critical self-reflexivity throughout the project. To produce decolonial knowledge, one must consider their positionality and relationship with power and knowledge within HE. This takes the form of my reflexive diary in this research, from which contents are shared throughout the dissertation.

As a student researching DTC at Keele university, I need to examine my evolving relationship with power and the production of knowledge. I am now responsible for collecting, analysing, and disseminating the perspectives of students: voices that are often excluded or neglected from wider DTC debates (Shahjahan et al., 2022).

I feel that I am better placed to understand and elicit the perspectives of students regarding Keele's DTC initiatives. I have been a student member of the staff-student working group in GGE and, therefore, have a clear understanding of the role of these working groups. This places me in a unique position to meet my sampling requirements and lead the research design and collection. This is an inherently decolonial way of producing knowledge; it redefines the normative idea of who can and cannot produce knowledge in the university.

My personal motivations for undertaking this dissertation are based on my own experiences of feeling excluded and marginalised in classroom spaces. As a Mixed-Race Black woman, navigating spaces that were never designed for you can be challenging and exhausting. I feel immense pressure to challenge these systems due to my light-skinned 'privilege'. My voice is heard more loudly, and I feel like I must expose the systems that oppress. Many are voiceless in this system; this research gives me a voice and a space to be heard.

Whilst many people of colour can share an experience where they were made to feel othered, lesser, and excluded within the university, I can only share my own experiences. My student participants have shared their own examples of these exclusionary practices and have inspired me to do the same in this research. Below is an excerpt from the reflexive diary that I have kept throughout this project. This recalls an experience that solidified my belief that DTC is an urgent imperative for Keele university.

"In a module from my master's programme, I asked the lecturer how to navigate the epistemological challenge of utilising philosophical theory created by an academic whose personal morals and beliefs are at odds with my own. I questioned how I could draw on this work and still claim to be producing decolonial research. A group of white philosophy students felt the need to interject and defend philosophy. This turned into an attack against my own experiences and research as DTC challenges eurocentric canon and

epistemological practices. They claimed that they could detach the racist ideology of Kant and his philosophies. I responded by calling out their white privilege to be able to do that. As a Black Mixed-race woman, I am not in the same position as them to separate the racist from the racism. These students continued their diatribe which denied my experiences and belittled my research. I realised that their sense of privilege allowed them to justify their actions which inherently silenced my voice and impacted my safety in the classroom space. They were utilising all the tools of racial oppression: gaslighting, guilt, and privilege to make their voice louder than mine. I am certain they did not understand the ramifications of their actions, yet this is not an isolated experience. It is an everyday occurrence for people of colour who are navigating university spaces”.

2. Literature Review

This literature review situates institutionally driven DTC initiatives in the broader discourse of (de)coloniality and the dominance of western knowledge over the other. The review will commence with 'Broader Decolonisation', where the postcolonial (Fanon, 2007; Spivak, 1988; Said, 1978) and geographical (Jazeel, 2012; Sharp, 2009) literature that underpins much of the DTC debate will be synthesised.

The second section, 'Institutional power and knowledge,' will explore Mignolo's (2011; 2002) work on Geopolitics of knowledge and how power and knowledge flow through a hierarchical space like the modern university (Foucault, 1991; Berger & Luckman, 1966).

The section, 'Decolonising the Curriculum in Higher Education' will focus on the power-knowledge relationship in DTC (Shain et al., 2021; Bhatnagar, 1986) and the core idea that students are co-creators of decolonised curriculums and pedagogy (Shahjahan et al., 2022; Motala et al., 2021; Begum & Saini, 2019).

Finally, the section 'UK higher education context', will concentrate on the case of DTC in HE in the UK, as this is the spatial location for the data collection in the research (Shain et al., 2021; Arday & Mizra 2018). This section will explore the barriers to DTC in UK universities and the role students can play in decolonising their institutions.

2.1. Broader Decolonisation

Postcolonial studies provide an essential theoretical underpinning by which we can understand the nuanced power relationship that still exists in the western university today. Said (1978) is most notable in this field, whose seminal text *Orientalism* provides a framework and lexicon to understand the coloniser/colonised relationship (Rotter, 2000). The text describes the self-perpetuating lens of the West, and the desires that construct the East with such conviction that over time, that the East reflects the Western imaginings back. Understanding how the Orient was colonially constructed is important to interpreting decolonial discourse in the university context (Labelle 2020; Hamadi 2014).

The idea of decolonisation that emerges from Said's (1978) work highlights how the imperial legacy and narrative must be destabilised through counter-hegemonic discourse and praxis (Labelle, 2020; Burney 2012). Most importantly for this review, Said's (2012; 1978) *Orientalism*, and *Culture and Imperialism* provide a lexicon that can be employed to describe and resist the prevalent imperialism in institutional spaces (Varisco 2017). Jazeel (2012) and Sharp (2009) draw on Said's (1978) text, purporting that the linguistic tools from *Orientalism* are integral for dismantling the eurocentrism in scholarly knowledge production and dissemination.

Spivak's (1991; Spivak & Riach, 2016) analysis of epistemic violence explores how the hegemonic knowledge practices of the West subalternised the colonised other. The resulting violence to the epistemologies and ways of knowing can be seen in how scholarly knowledge is produced. Spivak (1999) is critical of western academia as it is constructed to perpetuate Western economic and power desires. She argues that scholarly knowledge is always colonial, as it defines the Other as the object of study and as something from which knowledge should be extracted and rewritten (Spivak & Riach, 2016). Knowledge is inherently loaded with the colonial powers, legacy, and violence. It is then transmuted into a commodifiable asset only the West can own and know.

Fanon's (2007) theoretical conceptualisations of the post-colonial world are also foundational for much of the contemporary DTC literature (Wilder, 2004). His influence defined 'decolonisation' as more than a struggle for colonial emancipation. Instead, he purports that a decolonised world is critical of the institutions and prevalent eurocentrism that dominate marginalised minds and bodies (Fanon, 2007; Fairchild, 1994).

Fanon's (2007) articulation of the colonial/coloniser relationship as one of violence, resistance, and contradictions, whereby Eurocentric morality is undermined by the exercising of violence and brutality (Gibson, 2017; Fanon, 2007). This is important because it opens up space for anti-colonial resistance, ultimately influencing DTC as a form of epistemic resistance (Shahjahan, 2016; Keet, 2014; Mignolo, 2009).

A 'language of violence', more broadly violence in the name of resistance, remains contentious in decolonial dialogues (Lazarus, 1993). Fanon (2007) describes violence as a necessary tool to construct an emancipatory future, free from the oppressive structures and systems designed to dominate the Other (Gibson, 2017). Whilst contemporary iterations of decolonisation and, in particular, DTC does not demand violence in response to colonial violence (Bhambra et al., 2018), it does acknowledge the continued epistemic violence that the western university exerts on the knowledge of the periphery (Spivak & Riach, 2016).

Counter-discourse creation is central to DTC as it inherently undermines the colonial relationship between knowledge and power. Thiong'o's (1998) work on 'decolonising the mind' outlines how reclaiming native ways of knowing is a strategy for counter-hegemonic discourse. He defines it as the deconstruction of Eurocentric norms and knowledges that are imposed and permeated through the mind of the native. Drawing on the work of Said (1978) and Foucault (1991), Thiong'o (1998) examines how imperial power and brutality can reform the colonised as one that represents itself through the western lens (Nicole, 1999). The term 'decolonising the mind' has been utilised in DTC literature to explain the process of unknowing, unlearning, and undoing colonialism in oneself. The contemporary interpretations

of Thiong'o's (1998) work differ from the original material as they largely reject the binary of imperialism and resistance. Instead, it is moving towards a more ambivalent and subversive understanding of the existing power relationship (Hamadi, 2014).

Whilst understanding the broader theoretical frameworks from decolonial literature is central to underpinning this research, it must be understood through the lensing of geography. Postcolonial geographies are a well-established sub-discipline (Sharp, 2009), but decolonial geographies divert attention to unlearning colonialism's hegemonic geographical knowledges (Jazeel, 2016; 2012). Both sub-disciplines draw on similar theories and lexicon (Spivak & Riach, 2016; Fanon, 2007; Said, 1978), yet their interpretations have not received the same amount of focus in the current debate.

Drawing on seminal postcolonial writers such as Spivak (1988), Noxolo (2017) describes that decolonial theory focuses on the "epistemic challenge to colonialist thinking" (p342). Noxolo (2017) notes that decolonial geographies are associated with a different kind of positionality: it demands a "louder and more radical challenge" (p342). They argue that academia's role is to confront the deep-rooted inequalities in institutions and society at large. Jazeel (2017; 2012) emphasises the responsibility of academics and academic knowledge production that must interrogate the disciplinary practices and productions that continually facilitate these inequalities. Geography's interpretation of decolonisation, particularly its understanding of DTC, will be central to this research as it informs the methodological practices and re-articulation of core decolonial theory.

2.2. Institutional power and knowledge

The modern university is a complex institution entrenched in the legacy of colonialism. As an institution, it is made up of the everyday interactions, beliefs, and a shared sense of reality that perpetuate imperial knowledges and domination (Bhambra et al., 2018; Foucault, 1991; 1980; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Across the globe, the university acts as a mental and architectural reminder of the enduring colonial legacy (Bhambra et al., 2018; Jazeel, 2012).

In the UK, the colonial discourse influences the shared reality of the nation, resulting in a grandiose sense of superiority over the Other. This cultural context of the UK's relationship with the university and Empire is a complexity for DTC whilst simultaneously necessitating its challenge to UK Higher Education (Shahjahan et al., 2022; Laing, 2021; Arday & Mizra, 2018). Once a tool of colonialism, the university was subject to political and economic change due to the end of Empire (Jazeel, 2012). According to Gyamera and Burke (2018), this contributed to the shift towards neoliberalism and, in turn, the neoliberal university.

Dei (2019) notes how neoliberal changes have made HE a tool for capitalism in place of Empire. Foucault (1984; 1980) reiterates this by describing neoliberalism as a discourse that privileges the political economy. Whilst not intrinsically referring to university spaces, this theory provides insight into these institutional changes. Ultimately, it demonstrates how those at the centre of power control the body and norms of the Other through organised practice (Morrissey, 2013; Peters, 2007).

The power within the western university is not a result of the individual's actions but of power itself. According to Foucault (2007; 1984), power is self-sustaining and present throughout societal interactions and networks. The everyday actions, such as selecting curriculums, favouring humanistic or positivist approaches, and silencing the Other, sustain the agreed discourse and the microcosm of the institution. The institutionalisation that is present in the Western university perpetuates a colonial agenda through its hegemonic practices and structures (Bhatnagar, 1986). This understanding is key to comprehending the pervasive powers in the university and the challenges to decolonise (Mbembe, 2016; Keet, 2014).

Knowledge, and the ability it has to construct how the world is understood and experienced, is explored by Said (1978) concerning the University. Drawing on Foucauldian (1980) interpretations of power, Said (1978) describes how the West was prolific in creating a narrative of superiority over the mind and body of the colonised world. Thus, reinforcing white and western supremacy and its ability to control what discourse and knowledge are legitimised (Varisco, 2017; Bevir, 1980).

The university is a site of this discursive discourse that maintains control through the marginalisation of ways of knowing it cannot understand. This is exemplified in DTC where methodologies are deemed unscientific if they do not meet the conventional Western idealisations of truth and universality (Bhambra et al., 2018; Said, 1978). According to Mbembe (2016), the West presents its knowledge as a binary to other ways of knowing and seeing the world. DTC draws on theoretical understandings of power and knowledge to challenge the idea that scholarly knowledge produced in the West is universally true, while other forms of knowing are devalued and erased. At its core, it surmises that the western institution's historical and contemporary control over how knowledge is produced unevenly to exert internal and external domination over the Other (Bhambra et al., 2018; Bevir, 1999; Said, 1978). Mbembe (2016) is critical of the enduring omnipotence of western scholarship and the institutions that maintain the power to construct the world through their gaze.

This research requires that the power-knowledge relationship be analysed through an intrinsically decolonial lens. Mignolo's (2007) 'Geopolitics of knowledge' explores how knowledge systems find their origins in social and geographical contexts that are

subsequently situated in the systems of power that are “historically and transnationally constituted” (Shahjahan & Morgan 2016, p95; Alcoff, 2007). When applied to the university, these rooted power systems continually reproduce the exclusion and erasure of certain voices.

The Geopolitics of knowledge highlights how western (white) knowledges are privileged, thus giving the impression that these systems are universal and delocalised (Paasi, 2015). The university constructs, legitimises, and disseminates colonially derived ways of knowing the world and presents this as truth (Shahjahan, 2016). According to Mignolo (2007), to challenge the seeming omnipotence of western scholarship one must situate research, which can disarm the colonial epistemologies present (Shahjahan & Morgan, 2016). In relation to knowledge production in the university, the periphery (global south, people of colour, etc.) have their knowledge fetishised, subjugated, and silenced (Arday et al., 2021; Gusa, 2010; Mevorach, 2007). Shahjahan (2016) describes how “the west became the locus of epistemic articulation, and the rest of the world became an object to be described and studied from a European perspective” (p697). This highlights the university’s role in dominating global knowledge systems which cannot be undone without challenging the colonially entrenched epistemology that is at the core of the western university (Parreira do Amaral, 2022).

Mignolo’s (2009; 2007) notions of coloniality demands space for the deconstruction of western epistemic traditions and the acknowledgement of the silenced and erased knowledges. Decolonisation, particularly DTC, requires a plurality of knowledges and practices as part of the epistemic reparation (Bhambra et al., 2018). Noxolo (2017) purports that for the university to challenge coloniality, there must be a radical delinking from the nexus of ongoing inequalities rooted in imperialistic culture, which are endlessly re-staged and re-routed through the ever-deepening channels of inequalities that are brought about through neoliberalism.

Mignolo (2011; 2010) denotes that there must be a process of delinking from the major western macro narratives of society and culture. He describes delinking as the process where the colonised mind realises that one inferiority is a fiction designed to dominate and subjugate. The rejection of this narrative is an important aspect of DTC as it rejects the idea that epistemic assimilation is scholarly knowledge production and demands that a plurality of knowledges are legitimised and that their production is possible (Mbembe, 2016). Rejecting the universality of western epistemic traditions is complex to achieve in the University (Bhambra et al., 2018; Mbembe, 2016; Spivak, 1999). DTC attempts to challenge these normative epistemologies and is increasingly gaining awareness and traction (Keet, 2014; Kubota, 2020).

2.3. Decolonising the Curriculum in Higher Education

DTC confronts the university's hegemonic epistemologies and ontologies which have historically marginalised and exerted violence on the Other. It demands a plurality of the production and dissemination of knowledge (Bhambra et al., 2020; Begum & Saini, 2019; Mbembe, 2016). Institutions of HE remain “westernised in the sense that they are local instantiations of a dominant academic model based on Eurocentric systemic canon” (Mbembe, 2016, p32). The pervasive dominance of Eurocentric ways of knowing is exerted through academic knowledge and curriculums, which in turn justifies the continued exploitation and objectification of the Other.

According to Bhambra et al., (2018), the periphery (academics and students of colour, and the global majority) must be engaged in the conversation to reclaim power and agency over knowledge production. They write that “colonialism and colonial knowledge is produced, consecrated, institutionalised, and naturalised” (Bhambra et al., 2018, p5). This generates a (false) sense of superiority within the Western university, which in turn is the foundation to contemporary understandings of race, racism, and (in/)exclusion. It provided the moral and intellectual reasoning “for the dispossession, oppression, and domination of colonised subjects” (Bhambra et al., 2018, p5). DTC is concerned with undermining these power structures, to ultimately “break the relentless structuring of the exploitative and violent relationship - a break not a compromise” (Mendes & Lau, 2022, p233).

The university is an institution that is deeply rooted in colonial histories and violence (Pinar, 2008). These spaces remain “enduringly pale, male (and often stale)” (Bhambra et al., 2018, p6) and are often resistant to systemic or culture changes (Arday et al., 2021). Outside the university walls exists an uncertainty concerning the actualisation of DTC. Shahjahan et al., (2022) writes that curriculums and pedagogy are “deeply rooted in grounding, validating, and/or marginalising systems of knowledge production” (p2). This highlights the complexity in unlearning and acknowledging centuries of legitimised canon.

Another concern that Sanchez (2018) outlined is that there is no one way to decolonise the university. A predetermined framework, although easier, does not allow for situated change to take place. It also reinforces the colonial idea of universality, whereby knowledge can be applied to all, which results in the erasure and silencing of other ways of knowing (De, 2002). Decolonising the university and its curricula requires the counter-hegemonic praxis of academics, activists, and students. This collaborative effort to achieve meaningful change is met with resistance from right-wing media, the university institution, and, at times, their colleagues (Stolker, 2022). Many within the literature have questioned the extent to which

efforts of DTC decolonised HE (Vandeyar, 2020; Hoadley & Galant, 2019), with some questioning “whether such decolonisation is even possible” (Shahjahan et al., 2022, p2).

The challenges of DTC can be seen in Universities and scholars from the global south, who have been driving the discourse and praxis of DTC (Vandeyar, 2020; Bhambra et al., 2018; Grange, 2016). There is a particularly high-quality debate emerging from the African perspective. This literature is largely focused on student-led activism and is critical of Eurocentric norms in African universities, drawing on ideas such as Pan-Africanism, and Kenyan and South African postcolonial literature (Hendricks, 2018; Thiong’o, 1998; Mbembe, 2001; Fomunyam & Teferra, 2017). Universities in South Africa provide a plethora of research about student-led, grassroots attempts to decolonise.

An example of a student-led decolonisation attempt was evident at Cape Town University, where a movement in 2015 called ‘Rhodes must fall’ gained traction in the media and academic literature (Murriss, 2016; Newsinger, 2016). A subsequent study by Grange et al. (2020) investigated how decolonisation took place at Stellenbosch and Nelson Mandela University (South Africa). It examined if the decolonising measures were leading to institutional change. The study concluded that although grassroots-led activism is present in the university, there was little meaningful change at an institutional level. It was also critical of ‘decolonial washing’: a concept where institutional engagement with DTC is performative and superficial (Grange et al., 2020; Costandius et al., 2018; Fataar, 2018). This issue is not limited to South African Universities. It is a persistent issue for attempts to decolonise HE institutions in the UK (Phipps & McDowell, 2021; Moosavi, 2020).

2.4. UK higher education context

This review must situate DTC in the context of UK HE to understand the challenges and barriers that UK universities face in decolonising. Gopal (2021) iterates this complexity as decolonising non-settler spaces. This is based on Tuck and Yang’s (2012) concept of how decolonisation disseminates through different spaces. They define the spatiality of decolonisation as external, internal, and settler, with each requiring different approaches to dismantle the imperial legacy.

According to Arday and Mizra (2018), “Academia in Britain today often frames decolonisation as something which, if it needs to happen, as required elsewhere” (p294). The violence of Empire was an imagination, kept at a distance from the UK. The geography of Empire creates a disjuncture in the memory of the UK population and institutions, who can look back to the ‘good old days of Empire’ (Gilroy, 2013; Hall, 2004; 2002). This creates a unique cultural and political context in which decolonisation can struggle to take hold, as posited by Arday and Mizra (2018); decolonisation is something to happen elsewhere.

Whilst some universities, such as Oxford, directly contributed to the proliferation of Empire, all UK universities benefit in some way from this legacy. Keele, for example, although founded in 1949, benefits from being a western university and the epistemic privileges that comes along with that (Dolby & Rahman, 2008). There is an ambiguous relationship between motherland-colonies of the past and the legacy of that relationship today. Bhabra et al. (2018) demonstrate this ambiguity as “anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles were articulated in, through, and against Western universities” (p3).

The emergence of DTC in UK universities has led to an uptake in institutional pledges to decolonise, yet they remain largely white spaces, grounded in institutional racism and exclusion (Arday and Mizra 2018). Lidher et al., (2021) explores how the decolonial turn is the new way for institutions to show commitment to anti-racism, yet they are critical of the institutional misuse of decolonisation, which utilises the initiative solely for marketing or metrics.

This creates an extraordinary amount of pressure on staff and students of colour who are charged with decolonising the university (Hayes et al., 2021). Whilst not the same at DTC, RECs have similar goals of rebalancing power and whiteness within the university (Henderson & Bhopal, 2021; Bhopal, 2016). Decolonisation, however, is not an all-encompassing term for issues of race and other social injustices (Tuck & Yang 2012). Both REC and DTC highlight an increase in progressive race equality legislation and monitoring in UK institutions, yet Arday and Mizra (2018) suggest that these elicit a liberal, as opposed to a radical, response to inequality. Shain et al. (2021) theorise the institutional response to DTC from UK universities as “‘strategic rejection’, ‘reluctant acceptance’ and ‘strategic advancement’” (p929). This emphasises the idea of Lidher et al., (2021), that UK universities must be decolonial to seem relevant to an increasingly ‘woke’ prospective student (Sobande et al., 2022; Mendes & Lau, 2022). Shain et al., (2021) suggest that to challenge the ‘interest convergence’ of UK universities, grassroots networks of decolonisation must maintain independence from the university systems and “counter institutional co-option, incorporation, and the dilution of the radical message of decolonising” (p922).

Students have been involved in driving the grassroots and arguably more radical attempts to decolonise the university and its curriculum (Shain et al., 2021; Bhabra et al., 2018). Zinga and Styres (2013) write that students provide counter-hegemonic resistance to the normative practices within the university. They can find these institutional spaces marginalising due to their race, beliefs, and identities. Attempts to decolonise make way for reform in these exclusionary spaces (Mbembe 2016).

According to Dutta (2018), DTC “set the stage for students to question fundamental assumptions about knowledge and power, and engage questions such as what counts as knowledge, which produces knowledge and how and what/who is absent.” (p278). This builds on the theoretical work of Mignolo (2011; 2007) and highlights the culture change for students who no longer accept the normative and marginalising conditions of UK universities.

An example of student-driven change in the UK is within the 2015 ‘Rhodes must fall Oxford’, an anti-racist movement to remove the legacy of Rhodes (a tempestuous colonialist) from Oxford University (Bhambra et al., 2018; Newsinger, 2016). Student-led attempts to decolonise have led to widespread adoption of DTC in UK institutions (Nagdee & Shafi, 2021; Bhambra et al., 2018). The NUS led a subsequent campaign, ‘Why is my curriculum so white’ in 2016, creating space for discussion about the white, western-centric canon of the UK university (NUS, 2016). There are many other examples of student-led decolonisation in UK universities (Sheffield University, 2022; Hall et al., 2021; Anon, 2020), yet this has not become a centralised facet of the broader DTC literature. Since 2020 there has been an increase in student-centred literature that explores student activism through grassroots movements (Shain et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2021; Nagdee & Shafi, 2021)

Shahjahan et al., (2022) recognise that literature focusing on students as co-producers of DTC is a gap in the wider DTC literature. They write that “how students engage and perceive the efforts of the faculty are largely missing” (Shahjahan et al., 2022, p23). This reiterates the idea proposed by Shain et al., (2021), that student voices must be recentred in the DTC debate, as they have been driving change through radical grassroots movements in the UK. This is one of the many challenges of DTC: student resistance to the act of DTC itself, where students (usually white) see DTC as an attack on academic freedoms (Mendes & Lau, 2022; Meda, 2020).

There has been an increase in DTC research concerning the perspectives of UK students. Laing (2021) explores the perspectives of geography students concerning a decolonial module. This study exposed that student perspectives are central to maintaining and progressing DTC at UK universities. This is reiterated by Nagdee and Shafi (2021), whose research focused on student-led anti-racism at University College London. The research surrounding student-led interventions and student perspectives of DTC is vital to question normative pedagogy, western canon, and knowledge production (Shahjahan et al., 2022). Whilst this is a positive step in addressing a gap in the literature, there is still a lack of student-centred research or narratives.

According to Mbembe (2016), the decolonised university should reform, perhaps even renamed the ‘pluraliversity’, where a plurality of voices, perspectives and knowledges can be

input into producing and disseminating scholarly knowledge. Students remain the object of study in much of the DTC literature. Their voices, whilst heard, are still repackaged into normative research and literature. This arguably reproduces the colonial ways of producing knowledge that DTC is concerned with dismantling.

3. Methods

This research was designed utilising a decolonial methodological approach which will be explored in the methodology of this dissertation, along with the justification for the methods, tools, and analysis utilised. Nine participants were recruited, including five students and four experts. Each participant was provided with an Information Sheet (Appendix 1, 2, 3) explaining the nature of the research and informed consent by signing a consent form (Appendix 4, 5, 6) for each aspect of the method.

After providing consent, each participant was sent a digital reflexive diary (Appendix 7). Participants were instructed to reflect on their experiences with DTC and to write their thoughts; prompts were provided to help in case this exercise was proving difficult. The researcher kept their own reflexive diary throughout the design, data collection, and analysis of this research. After completing the reflexive diary, participants were invited to a one-to-one semi-structured interview. The interview schedules (Appendix 8, 9) were semi-structured, with additional questioning based on an analysis of the reflexive diary to further explore participant experiences.

Preliminary analysis and findings from the interviews were presented (Appendix 10) to the three faculty DTC workshops, each containing approximately 20 members of staff and school-level DTC representatives. The discussion points from these workshops were disseminated (but not reported in the scope of this research) into high-level feedback. All student interview participants were invited to attend a focus group and presented with high-level DTC workshop feedback for discussion. The focus groups also covered recommendations and their idea of what DTC should look like in the future. The focus group was also semi-structured, utilising a loose pre-defined interview schedule (Appendix 11) to guide the topics of conversation.

4. Methodology

4.1. Decolonial methodologies

This research aims to produce decolonial knowledge and must draw upon decolonial epistemologies to do so. However, there is no agreed-upon way to produce decolonial research; the broader discourse remains largely theoretical and presents a challenge to apply in practice (Smith, 2021a; Mbembe, 2016). Within the geographical sub-discipline, decolonial methods remain a site of debate (Stanek, 2019; Noxolo, 2017, Jazeel, 2017). Whilst geographical literature has a robust set of methodologies, this cannot simply draw on the ways of producing knowledge of the past. It must attempt to redefine who can produce academic knowledge and how that knowledge can be created.

Drawing on the plethora of decolonial literature can help with the unlearning of western-centric epistemologies and critically engage new means of production. A decolonised methodology must consider four tenets: "(1) exercising critical reflexivity, (2) reciprocity and respect for self-determination, (3) embracing "Other(ed)" ways of knowing, and (4) embodying a transformative praxis" (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021, p1). These tenets suggest that reflexivity, agency, pluralistic voices, and epistemic resistance are at the core of decolonial praxis.

This research draws on a quotation from radical Black feminist Audre Lorde "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 2000, p1). This refers to the idea that Eurocentric epistemologies cannot be challenged if research is produced utilising the same practices and methods. Mbembe (2016) reiterates this in his critique of the humanistic turn, which he argues is a repackaged form of the same epistemic violence against the Other. This research attempts to challenge the normative epistemologies that are ingrained in the institution. Drawing on decolonial discourse, the methods outlined below have been designed and adapted to be mindful of the complex positionality and complicity of knowledge production.

This methodology evaluates the role of epistemology and draws on decolonial understandings about how knowledge can be produced with these new tools (Kubota, 2020; Bhambra, 2020; Keet, 2014). These methods aim to challenge eurocentrism, empower, and create emancipatory narratives (Gentles et al., 2015). The methodological approach in this research will dictate how the methods are designed to create space for innovative, decolonial knowledge products. However, no single approach can be applied to decolonising epistemology. Therefore, this research will draw on two critical aspects of decolonialism: reflexivity and collaboration.

Reflexivity is often employed in counter-colonial research (Nicholls, 2009); it allows the research and researcher to engage with the entrenched power dynamics of the university and make space for emancipatory research practices. This is exemplified in indigenous research methods, which maintain a complex relationship in conducting research in academic institutions. Indigenous methods often reject conventional modes of knowing and adopt participatory and collaborative methods, which require the researcher to immerse themselves in a critical self-reflection (Bhambra et al., 2018; Pete, 2018; Wilson & Cavender, 2005).

Whilst this research cannot claim to use indigenous methods, it does draw on the idea that reflexivity can become an essential methodological tool when researching the university (Smith, 2021b; Rix et al., 2019). Calderon (2016) considers reflexivity as an intervention to the continuation of epistemic violence in research. It must be utilised to challenge the researcher to acknowledge their own coloniality and turn towards a decolonial gaze of doing research (Nadarajah et al., 2022; Moosavi, 2022). The decolonial understanding of reflexivity will be utilised throughout this research to address the complex power dynamics of the university and producing research.

Another tenet of decolonial methodologies is to counter the research tradition that have long been an exploitative process whereby the West exerts epistemic violence over the Other and treat them as an object to know (Mbembe, 2016; Spivak, 1999, 1985). Whilst in theoretical literature the calls for epistemic resistance and counter-colonial narratives aim to rebalance the historic and cultural power imbalance between the coloniser and the colonised, it can be challenging to apply this to practise.

Asiamah et al., (2021) proffers a set of protocols with aim to decolonise academic knowledge production. They describe that research must be "(1) salient for those studied, (2) informed by those studied, and (3) beneficial for those studied" (p549). This redefines the relationship between the researcher and the researched, as it suggests that the researcher must centre the needs of the participants in the design and data collection. It also examines the concept of collaborative research. Decolonial research must be an iterative process where the participant can control their agency and narratives. The final aspect of the concept is the idea that research must be beneficial to those who are being studied. This goes beyond compensating participants for their time; it must attempt to address the social and power inequalities for the researched. Whilst this idea of iterative collaboration presents practical challenges, it is an important consideration for this research (Asiamah et al., 2021; Dickerson et al., 2016). Understanding DTC at Keele and drawing on the students who co-produced decolonisation at the university must attempt to inform future DTC work and change.

Decolonialism is inherently concerned with challenging the normative social and epistemological practices derived from a colonial history of the world. DTC is a movement to confront the colonial epistemic lens that exists in the university. Again, drawing on the quotation by Lorde (2000), how can new (decolonial) knowledge be produced when the same colonially rooted tools are utilised. To this effect, this research has an obligation to reject conventional methodologies and draw on decolonial methodologies. This is a form of epistemic resistance, defined as "the use of our epistemic resources and abilities to undermine and change oppressive normative structures and the complacent cognitive-affective functioning that sustains those structures" (Medina 2012, p3; Frega, 2013).

DTC is a form of epistemic resistance and, therefore, researching the barriers and perception of such an initiative must also act as resistance to the conventional means of producing knowledge (Smith, 2021a; Bhambra et al., 2018; Mbembe, 2016). The methodological approach in this research also draws on the idea of epistemic disobedience, which Mignolo (2011, 2007, 2009) articulates as a delinking from the illusion that a zero-point epistemology exists. This suggests that the researcher can envision an academic knowledge production through a different lens and does not have to assimilate to the homogenising episteme of the university (Morreira, 2017; Mignolo, 2009).

4.2. Sampling

The strategy for sampling the student participants in this research was facilitated through the DTC leads and Head of schools at Keele. Each of the 13 schools has an appointed DTC lead who are responsible for leading staff-student working groups to decolonise their subject. These facilitators were asked to share a brief summary of the research to their networks. This led to several enquiries about the research but unfortunately no volunteers for participation. Alongside this, the researcher reached out to students who were part of the DTC network. Reaching out to individual DTC and SSVC students proved more effective. This resulted in five student interviews.

Sampling students for this research was a challenge. There were two main reasons for this, with the first being a lack of student engagement. Shahjahan et al., (2022) notes that a barrier to DTC is student resistance they are often apathetic to institutional change. This is particularly prevalent in marginalised students as they experience the colonised curriculum and university most strongly. Opposing this are the students who reject DTC as they deem it an affront to academic freedoms (Arday et al., 2021; Meda, 2020; Bhambra et al., 2018). The pool of students who met the participant criteria was approximately 300 students. Whilst this a small pool to sample from it was hoped that due to their engagement in school level DTC and SSVC they would be interested in taking part in the research. This was also reflected in

a lack of communication from potential participants: there were four consent forms returned that did not lead to interviews due to a lack of response. The second barrier to the sampling was a lack of institutional structure for contacting DTC leads. Of the 13 heads of school's contacted, only 11 could provide contact details for their DTC leads. Once DTC leads from the schools were contacted, it emerged that one school had no students in their DTC working groups. Of the 12 eligible schools, only six responded to the call for participants and kindly shared the research summary to their students.

As well as the student interviews, five DTC experts were approached. This included academic staff, non-academic staff, a student union representative, and a founding member of the DKN. These participants were selected utilising purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is defined as the researcher selecting participants utilising their own knowledge and understanding of the research (Campbell et al., 2020). It is a particularly useful method when there are limited resources (time or funding) for the research project (Palinkas et al., 2015). The expert interviews were selected to gain an overview of how DTC is perceived and understood throughout the hierarchy of Keele. It was therefore necessary for the researcher to select participants who were knowledgeable about DTC and could represent the multiple facets of a complex institution.

4.3. Ethics

This research obtained ethical approval from the Ethics board in GGE on the 24th of February 2022 (Appendix 12). All necessary ethical procedures were followed throughout this research according to the guidance from the ethics approval procedure at Keele University. All participants were made aware of the risks of participating in this research through an information sheet. At this stage, if they wanted to participate in the research, informed consent was obtained using consent forms.

Participant anonymity could not be ensured entirely due to the use of focus groups; participants who took part were asked to review an additional information sheet and complete a secondary consent form which made them aware of this. The recordings and transcriptions of the data were kept on a secure, password-protected device, and participants' names were anonymised through pseudonym initials and identifying details were redacted.

Due to the nature of this research being relatively small world, certain information such as schools, subjects, and names mentioned in the interviews were redacted. The demographic information that will be shared in this research is vital to understanding the analysis, but was limited to protect the participants' identity. In the analysis, descriptions of race are limited to

BAME or white. It was noted if the participant was a student (and which year they were in) or a staff member.

4.4. Interviews

Brinkmann (2014) describes interviews that are influenced by decolonialism as having transformative abilities; in which they can subvert the colonising tendencies that conventional interviewing can produce. Throughout this research the researcher had a responsibility to challenge homogenising and epistemically violent ideas that may emerge. This idea was informed by the decolonial methodologies literature that suggests the researcher must both make room for marginalised voices (such as students in the university) and challenge colonial rooted ideology that may exist in participants (Bhambra et al., 2018; Donelson, 2018; Agboka, 2014). There is no one defined way to interview in decolonial methodologies, which is, in part, due to the idea that knowledge should be individualised and situated (Wilson et al., 2022; Shahjahan et al., 2022). It is also due to the relative infancy of decolonial methodologies in academia. This research will draw on influential decolonial literature to adapt the method of interviewing to allow for collaborative and reflexive knowledge to be produced.

These methodologies highlight that, in interviewing indigenous groups such as the Māori people, an hour would not be appropriate as there is a "whole cultural framework at play" (Smith, 2021b, p7). Instead, they need to be able to tell their story in their own time (Smith 2021b). This means that participants from different backgrounds and cultures possess different understandings and that means of sharing experience for some, like the Māori people, requires a strong interpersonal connection and the time to share. Time was limited within this research, so it was not possible to allow participants an undefined amount of time to express their perspectives and experiences of DTC. This research, however, can draw on the methodological idea by Smith (2021a) and the indigenous method of storytelling and adapting it to conventional interviewing. The act of storytelling is a resistance to the homogenising of knowledge and cultures. Smith (2021a) argues that the story itself has power, as it contributes to a collective story that, in turn, positions indigenous experience at the forefront. Storytelling is intimately connected to the forms of remembering and knowing within and against a colonial system. Colonially imposed language and knowledge aimed to erase indigenous culture and the act of storytelling reclaims power through a dialogue that names the social world in their (indigenous peoples) own way (Zavala, 2016; Pete, 2018).

Each student participant interview was set for 30 minutes, yet participants were made aware that they could take as long as they needed to share their experiences with the researcher. This offered a level of openness to allow for their narratives to emerge organically. Alongside

this, the student participants were asked to complete a reflexive diary one week prior to the interview (detailed in the reflexivity section of this methodology) and offered a focus group session after the interview was completed. This allowed the researcher to develop a relationship with the interviewees that transcends the normative confines of semi-structured interviewing (Longhurst, 2003).

The expert interviews were slightly longer as it was the only opportunity the researcher had to converse with them. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes, yet the participants were made aware that they could take as long as they needed to share their experiences and views. DTC can elicit sensitive and challenging views and experiences for the participants; they need the time and space to be able to work through these emotive ideas.

An unstructured interview has predetermined themes but does not have a predefined interview schedule (Longhurst 2003). The openness of this interviewing approach is most aligned with tenets of decolonising methodologies as they offer the opportunity for the participant to retain agency and power (Mbembe, 2016). This method can also challenge the idea that the researcher possesses the ability to legitimise knowledge whilst the participant is the passive object of study (Asiamah et al., 2021).

In practice, unstructured interviews are time consuming and can result in the research questions being left unanswered (Dowling et al., 2016). This boundary between limiting participant agency and gaining relevant data is a challenge. However, this research is concerned with centring the voices of the students in relation to their understanding and perception of DTC. Therefore, a loosely structured interview schedule was adopted with themes to discuss and prompts/probes to elicit more detail on the subject.

Clarke and Braun (2013) note that the interview can result in individualised data and offers that opportunity for the interviewer to control the topic and/or direction of the interview. The individualisation of the interviews in this research was essential in understanding the unique experience of the student participants and their encounters with DTC. Each student interview was adapted based on the reflexive diary that they were asked to complete. This was to allow the continuation of their story in the research. Whilst an interview schedule was prepared before the interviews, the researcher followed the narrative of the participant which drove the interviews into new and often unexpected directions. The overarching themes of the student interview schedule were defined as: 1) Motivation; 2) Change; and 3) Collaboration. Each theme has several prompts to aid in the direction of the interview. The expert interviews in this research required a different approach to that of the student participants. The aim of these interviews was to gain an insight into the hierarchical power structure of the university, which hoped to highlight the barriers to DTC at Keele. Whilst the

overarching themes of the expert interviews were similar to the student schedule, it had to take on a more structured approach. This was due to the limited time that staff at Keele possess to take part in student led research.

4.5. Reflexivity

There is a unique power dynamic in this research project as the researcher is both student, participant, and responsible for conducting the research. This is particularly salient for DTC research as there are calls for a plurality of voices to contribute to the scholarly knowledge (Shahjahan et al., 2022). Whilst making this research of great interest for the wider literary debate, it presents a challenge for the researcher. The widely understood boundaries for the researcher-participant relationship is blurred and could lead to ethical concerns.

To avoid such ethical issues, this project draws on decolonial methodological approaches, which will create knowledge that is collaborative and co-produced by students. To fully understand their perspectives and barriers, it was important to employ reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis. Reflexivity is a widely utilised methodological tool in counter-colonial research (Nicholls, 2009) as it allows the researcher to engage with the entrenched power relations of the university and make room for emancipatory research to be produced.

This methodological decision was undertaken in response to decolonial and geographical criticisms of 'transparent reflexivity,' whereby the researcher does not address the inherent social inequalities to produce academic knowledge (Kobayashi, 2003, 1994). The limitation of such reflexive practice can be understood as a tokenistic attempt to justify a lack of ethics and awareness of the researcher's power (Nadarajah et al., 2022).

To address the complexities of simultaneously being an insider and outsider to this research (Oswin, 2020; Berger, 2015), the utilisation of reflexivity was holistic and incorporative. As a student engaged in DTC, the researcher was able to 'write from' experiences of marginalisation and a lack of inclusivity in the university (Kobayashi, 2003). This provided nuance of the complex relationship that exists between students of colour and UK universities (Arday et al., 2021; Arday & Mizra, 2018).

Being able to 'write from' does not solely provide the legitimacy to create and disseminate knowledge as a researcher. According to Nadarajah et al., (2022), reflexivity must be employed by the researcher and surpass individual experience and positions. It is not the case that one can simply 'write from' experience; as a researcher of colour this issue is particularly important to address (Noxolo, 2017). To produce decolonial knowledge of and within the university the epistemological structures that exist must be confronted in reflexive practice (Nadarajah et al., 2022; Nicholls, 2009). Without this, the imperial systems of

marginalisation in academia continue their pervasive domination over the narratives of the Other.

Having drawn upon decolonial and geographical understandings of the power relations in research, this project employed the use of reflexive diaries. Student participants were asked to complete a reflexive diary about their understanding and experience of DTC. It was composed of a short brief about their involvement in DTC and three open-ended prompts to provide a framework for them to follow. They were invited to complete these following the framework or, alternatively, completing it in a way that felt comfortable for them. The openness of the reflexive diaries was influenced by the decolonial tenets of individual and situated research (Asiamah et al., 2021; Kobayashi, 2003; Rose, 1997). The diaries gave them the opportunity to express ideas and concepts that are perhaps difficult to verbalise such as racism and exclusion (Harvey, 2011). Anderson (2012) notes that reflexive diaries allow student participants to apply concepts or more abstract ideas to their everyday lived experiences. They also provided a starting point for the interviews. A decolonial approach to interviewing allows the participant to lead and direct the interview (Kelly, 2010), where they could maintain agency over their narratives and the knowledges they contribute (Mbembe, 2016).

The researcher also completed a reflexive diary throughout the process of research design, collecting data, and analysing this research. This diary differed from that of the student participants as the researcher had to address the complexity of the power dynamics that exist in researching the colonial university. This reflexive diary was influenced by auto-ethnographic methods, which are defined as the artistic and analytical portrayals of how we come to know, understand, and interpret experiences (Jones et al., 2016). In decolonial research, they present as a method to disrupt western epistemic traditions as they reclaim the power over one's agency and knowledges (Pham & Gothberg, 2020; Chawla & Atay, 2018).

Reflexive diaries can be challenging to employ in practice, as it requires courage to share "peripheral experiences" (Chawla & Atay, 2018, p3). Toyosaki (2018) argues that decolonial autoethnography is a continuous self-reflexive process that allows the researcher to challenge the normativity in the university. This method was utilised to challenge the power relations between the researcher, researched, and the episteme of the university. Dutta (2018) writes that "the account of the personal disrupts the colonizing tropes," which was a central consideration to designing the methods for this research, and acts as a "site for voicing resistance" (p94).

4.6. Presentations

Students co-produce DTC (Shahjahan et al., 2022; Meda, 2020; Bhambra et al., 2018) and need a forum for their voices to be heard and acknowledged by the university. Part of utilising decolonial methodologies is that research must be "beneficial for those studied" (Asiamah et al., 2021, p549). This was particularly challenging to achieve due to the limited time frame and funding of a master's level research project, yet it was important that this research attempt to be beneficial for the participants who are engaged with DTC at Keele. To achieve this, it was decided that the early findings be shared in a space that can drive change at the university. The circularity of the feedback loop of this research is a key part of producing decolonised knowledge and research.

The expert and student interviews were analysed, and the emerging themes were presented at the faculty wide DTC workshops at Keele University. The three faculties at Keele (Humanities, Medicine, and Natural Sciences) each take part in annual DTC workshops in which they can share challenges, best practice, and future goals for the initiative at Keele. Students at Keele are not normally privy to faculty-wide events, yet this was facilitated by the DTC academic lead at Keele, Dr Lisa Lau. Each presentation was 10 minutes long and was accompanied by slides to visually demonstrate the early findings. This provided an opportunity for heads of schools, deans of education, and lecturers to gain insight to how student participants felt about DTC at Keele. These presentations were a unique opportunity for a student-led research project to be presented to the faculties. In turn drawing of tenets of DTC which call for the hierarchical power structures of the university to be addressed and a plurality of voices to be heard (Bhambra et al., 2018; Mbembe, 2016).

Whilst not a method in its own right, the presentations of early findings created a holistic feedback loop for this research, whereby the perspectives of staff and students could be responded to by the faculty at large. These responses could then be fed back to the student participants, thus rebalancing a hierarchical power-knowledge system existing in the university (Shain et al., 2021; Joseph, 2010). It was also hoped that these presentations could reshape what collaboration between staff and students looks like. In the traditional staff-student relationship, academic staff disseminate and legitimise knowledge down the institutional hierarchy. DTC is a direct challenge to the normative hierarchical powers of the university. Therefore, the methodologies utilised to create decolonial knowledge must reflect DTC tenets (Shahjahan et al., 2022; Bhambra et al., 2018; Grange, 2016)

4.7. Focus group

Collaborative and salient methodologies were central in designing this research project, which posed a practical challenge pertaining to disseminating the research to the student

participants. There is a need for research to be shared with the community that co-produced it to allow for agency and ownership over contributed knowledges (Rankl et al., 2021; Romm, 2014). To maintain student agency over their perspectives of DTC, participants were invited to a focus group after the faculty-wide presentations. This was to allow participants an opportunity to see the preliminary findings, an overview of faculty level responses, gain oversight of the DTC work taking place at Keele, and create space for general feedback and thoughts. The student involvement in DTC is a core tenet of the initiative and it was therefore important to design methods that centred the student in the research in a meaningful way (Shahjahan et al., 2022; Bhambra et al., 2018)

The focus group was made up of four students. The background information recorded was limited to what they choose to share. It was not the aim of this research to gain metrics of difference between the students, but to foster a sense of agency over their experiences and narratives. They all came from different disciplinary backgrounds, but all were involved with DTC working groups and/or SSVC. The focus group was conducted via Microsoft Teams as the student participants were used to sharing DTC related thoughts in this format. Most DTC working groups and SSVC sessions at Keele are run virtually since Covid19. Virtual focus groups also offer an increased sense of anonymity, where participants can control their camera and audio (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). This was important as the comfortability of each participant was integral in this data collection. The session lasted approximately 90 minutes, but participants had the option to stay behind and share thoughts or ask questions in private after the focus group.

There was one focus group with only student participants being invited, as inviting the other participants would make for complicated power dynamics. Lecturers, staff, Student Union reps, etc. have different experiences and, therefore, perspectives of DTC (Dowling, 2005). Students needed to feel safe and free to express honest response to DTC at Keele which could not be achieved if staff were present (Ollis & Gravett, 2020, Bhambra et al., 2018). This project attempts to centre student voices and their role as co-producers of DTC; it was therefore important that they have space in a focus group to do so (Shahjahan et al., 2022).

There was a concern that some students would feel less comfortable in speaking up during the focus group due to their race, beliefs, and culture. To mitigate against any arising issues, careful moderation was undertaken. Typically, the researcher should maintain a level of distance from the group discussions, yet more active moderation was necessary due to the complex and often contested understandings of DTC (Longhurst, 2003; Krueger, 1997; Smith, 1995;. In addition to this, there was a conscious effort to not reproduce colonially derived knowledge and language in this research project, so it was important to acknowledge and address such language as it arises (Smith 2021a; Mbembe, 2016). This approach was

adopted to maintain the ethics of producing decolonial research (Asiamah et al., 2021; Sim & Waterfield, 2019).

The focus group schedule was predesigned and loosely followed the structure outlined by Breen (2006). They describe focus groups as being made up of the following components: welcome; overview; rules; questions; and background info. This focus group deviated from this structure somewhat to avoid an overly formal session and allow group narratives to flourish independent to the researcher. The session instead utilised welcome, overview, presentation, thoughts and prompts, and open discussion.

Since there is no intercommunication between school-level DTC and SSVC groups, it was important to give time for students to generate rapport and a shared sense of experience (Cameron, 2005). The student participants were also invited to listen to the same presentation as given to the faculty workshops. This gave participants an opportunity to respond to the initial analysis of the interview data and gain oversight into DTC at Keele. Drawing on the idea that decolonial discourse influences interviews and should maintain openness (Mbembe, 2016), the focus group had limited structure in terms of questions and prompts. Student participants were invited to direct their feedback to the presentation and overview in their own way.

4.8. Analysis

Utilising a decolonial lens for the analysis of this research draws on the principles outlined by Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021), who necessitate the use of critical reflexivity, centring participant self-determination, embracing Other(ed) knowledges, and employing transformative praxis. At its core, a decolonial analysis is an awareness that knowledge is never innocent or free from power (Foucault, 1991; Said, 1978). DTC is inherently concerned with knowledge and power; the knowledge that is produced in this research must consider the researcher's role in manipulating and collecting data. Simultaneously, the researcher is conditioned by the structures that inform their methods and act of doing research (De Eguia Huerta, 2020).

This research is informed by a decolonial lens on grounded theory. De Eguia Huerta (2020) defines this as being able to "uncover contradictions, deconstruct dominant discourses and thereby contribute to the decolonization of knowledge" (p372). This concept is central to the design of this research and must be incorporated in its analysis (O'Connor et al., 2018). Constructivist Grounded Theory provided the flexibility to make space for the knowledge of the Othered. The constructivist approach is based on interpretivist assumptions and subjectivities (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). This highlights the fluidity of social realities and dismisses the notion that reality is objective (Charmaz, 2014). Due to its iterative process of

understanding data and social constructs, this approach facilitates the use of reflexivity and collaboration in research (De Eguia Huerta, 2020; Charmaz, 2006).

Constructivist grounded theory is inherently inductive; it aims to create theory based on the data itself. The researcher must be prepared to constantly question their findings and use the data to construct theory. Charmaz (2006) describes how "data is constructed through our observations and interactions, as well as diverse sorts of materials that we may collect" (p3). This approach can encourage epistemological pluralism, which is central to DTC and wider decolonial discourse. Through an openness in the researcher a decolonial lens on Grounded theory can allow us to "encounter ideas or perspectives, amongst others, that otherwise we would have never been able to see or hear" (De Eguia Huerta, 2020 p374).

To draw on decolonial grounded theory and the core concept of collaboration (Thambinathan and Kinsella, 2021; Asiamah et al., 2021), the emerging findings of the research were presented to Keele Staff at the DTC faculty workshops and the student participants in the focus group. Both staff and students were encouraged to respond to the emerging themes, in turn informing the analysis. The student participants were given time and space to co-produce the analysis for this research as their voices, perspectives, and experiences are often neglected from the discourse of DTC (Shahjahan et al., 2022).

Asiamah et al. (2021) write: "we enact justice by including study participants and incorporating their perspectives into the research design and analysis" (p549). This was interpreted as the idea that participants must play a central role in the design and analysis of the research that it for and about them. The interview data would be analysed using thematic analysis, defined as an inductive approach that can reveal repeated patterns of meaning in data (Braun & Clarke., 2022). This allows for the emerging themes to be driven from the data, instead of attempting to fit the data to pre-existing theories (Clarke et al., 2015). This choice was influenced by decolonial discourse as it encourages the participant's data to drive the theory and themes. Students were given space and opportunity to inform the analysis of this research by feeding back on the themes/findings. Their responses were then used to inform further analysis and would be utilised in generating theory.

5. Discussion

5.1. Researcher Reflections

On presenting my findings

As part of this research, I was able to present my methods and early findings at the DTC faculty workshops in May. Whilst being able to share my research was a privilege, the experience left me with trepidation about DTC's future at Keele. Across the sessions I gained staff perspectives on DTC and my research, which would then be fed back to the students in a focus group later.

Starting with the faculty of Humanities: there was a good level of response across the schools, and it was an overall positive experience. I was pleasantly surprised about the level of engagement in my research from staff. As a student you are rarely able to provide and legitimise new knowledge to academic staff. This felt inherently decolonial, as my presence and delivery challenged the normative flow of knowledge and power in the institution.

One question from the session resonated with me, 'How do we respond to student experiences and stop them falling through the cracks?' This question is complex, and I found it challenging to answer it at the time. Having had time to reflect, I feel that student experience is at the centre of university life and growth, but the space for students to share these experiences are, at times, inadequate at Keele. My own experience of feeling othered in a classroom this year can articulate this inadequacy.

"Hearing a lecturer describe Black people as coloured in 2022 was a shock to me. I am used to hearing/experiencing racism in the outside world, with social media etc. Yet in a space (the classroom) that I feel powerful in, it was a disarming experience. I can speak the language of academia, I am versed, trained, yet my safety and learning can be so easily disrupted by an individual. The lexicon to describe race is challenging and there are no 'right' ways to do it, so I understand that mistakes can happen, yet for me the subsequent response is where I began to question my safety and the safety for other marginalised students.

Whether we describe it as white guilt, or the challenge of an institution that systematically privileges white voices and uneven power dynamics, the inability to own up to the mistake and then experiencing gaslighting and blame as if it were my fault for being upset by the incident.

The systems in the university do not make this kind of accountability easy or transparent. Whilst I had to work very hard to get a class apology, I can't be confident that this lecturer won't make other students (and staff) feel the same way in the future. There cannot be true

accountability in the institutional space, to challenge is to undermine. This is not a unique example; I can think of countless conversations where students described feeling othered and attacked by staff and students in the university. It makes me question how DTC can ever be achieved with systems in place that were never designed for us to feel safe?”

I wrote this after a difficult encounter with an academic at Keele earlier this year. I found it difficult to navigate the systems that are in place to report these issues. It was exhausting and painful. So, to answer the question: ‘How do we respond to student experiences and stop them falling through the cracks?’ We must make safe space for students to share, report, and explore their negative experiences. They cannot be dismissed or have the burden placed on the student to correct marginalising behaviour.

Another aspect of the presentations that stood out to me was the final one with the faculty of Natural Science. Overall, this had the least staff engagement, which was disappointing considering I, myself, am part of this faculty. There was a level of defensiveness concerning a quotation from my research, regarding white, male, middle class academics delivering decolonised lectures. This reaffirmed to me that there is still white fragility and guilt present in schools at Keele. Staff perhaps have more self-reflection to do to address this.

Within this session there was an incident of sorts, where a person of colour who was delivering a presentation upset the dynamic of the virtual space. They were disruptive, combative and in many ways unprofessional. The other staff were visibly uncomfortable; it resulted in all cameras being turned off. This presentation challenged the norms of how knowledge should be shared; it was uncomfortable and pained me to watch the encounter. It felt like a voice of colour had to be silenced to progress DTC at Keele. This was inherently jarring. Decolonised universities should be spaces where people of colour can share in a multitude of ways.

5.2. Change

“Chip, chip, chip. Things splinter. Maybe we can turn that chip, chip, chip into a hammer: we might chip away at the old block” (Ahmed, 2016, p1).

The metaphor in Ahmed’s (2016) essay is particularly apt in articulating the enduring challenge of change in an institution. Change is not linear; each chip and splinter differ in effort and size, yet all is deemed progress. Those navigating this flux of progress highlight that change is an (im)possibility (Noxolo, 2022), by which DTC change is both achievable and unattainable.

At Keele, participants of DTC represent the ambiguity of change, where there is no clear positive or negative change within the university. Instead, change is messy, slow, and, at

times, contested. Across the structural hierarchy of the university, change is transparent in the sense that it is easy to perceive and encompass. Ahmed's (2016) quote will be utilised as a framework by which DTC change at Keele can be understood. 'Chips and Splinters' refers to small changes that participants can (or cannot) see at Keele. 'Chipping away at the old block' introduces the participant's perspective on how change is constructed at Keele and what it should look like.

5.2.1. Chips and Splinters

The participants in the research had different opinions on the incremental DTC changes at Keele; they largely agreed that large-scale change could not happen without small steps. "I think when you want those cultural shifts, it is those kind of small actions you need to like to do and to progress with before you can get that big change" (SH, senior management, interview). This articulates the idea that change within the university is slow and must be measured. Without this measured approach, cultural change cannot take place. Those navigating the university structures that they are attempting to change are simultaneously complicit and driving change.

This idea appears in Shahjahan et al.'s (2022) writing: "in other words, our understandably pressing need for urgent decolonizing outcomes needs to be humbled by the pace of meaningful change that is not necessarily under our control, but context-specific, slow, and fluid" (p29). They describe decolonisation as an urgent imperative needed to undo and unlearn the coloniality of the university. Bhabra et al. (2018) describe DTC as a frightening and, at times, radical change for those who are complicit and benefit from the current system. Significant cultural shifts that take place too quickly threaten normativity and are often not conducive to meaningful and lasting change.

Within the staff-student DTC working groups, students play a role in producing DTC in their school, yet, according to the student participants, this does not necessarily result in transparency about what change is taking place. "I feel like because I've only been here a year and because there's not been much talk about it, even if things have changed, I haven't really noticed anything" (HR, 1st year student, BAME, interview). The system of curricula design at Keele is not transparent, even for students who are meant to be involved in this process as part of DTC working groups.

There are problems with how decolonial changes in curriculums are communicated to students. "I'm aware of future research projects on DTC and the team's space and the increase in delivery but I don't know how much work is going into DTC" (FSA, 2nd year student, white, interview). This highlights that whilst some students are aware that change is

taking place, the lack of adequate communication about the exact change leaves them uncertain that it is even taking place.

While these students are involved in the DTC working groups, their involvement is isolated to the school level. "I don't necessarily feel like enough change has like happened in the past or will happen in the future, and it sounds a bit pessimistic" (AT, 2nd year student, BAME, interview). When interviewing AT on what change they had seen within their school, their response highlights the emerging student perception of DTC change. Students at Keele are often unaware of change happening around them. As previously stated, change is transparent: obvious to those exacting change yet unclear for those who do not play a direct role in it. There is the widespread issue that students are only part of the university for a relatively short time, which can make change difficult to see. Students do not possess the oversight of the university to understand what progress is being made, partly due to their relatively short time at the university and DTC issues they face within the university.

Whilst senior management oversees DTC change and progress, students do not share that perspective. AT also noted that they do not think enough change can happen at Keele. Whilst they did not give any reasons for this mistrust of the institution, it demonstrates the notion of institutional mistrust. In a reflexive article, Raze Memon and Jivraj (2020) suggest that "as a junior faculty and graduate student along with other students like myself already perceive the institution with mistrust" (p480). They suggest that marginalised students do not always believe in institutional attempts to improve or change. This was reiterated by a participant who reflected on their experiences as students involved in DTC work: "I think students probably don't have trust in the university as well. For whatever reasons they might think it is the university just doing this is a tick box exercise of the university and I can understand cause I had those same feelings as a student" (SH, Senior management, BAME, interview).

The focus group with the students highlighted the incremental changes that have taken place at Keele and the future of DTC within the university. This offered students an opportunity to gain oversight about the change more broadly. In a sense, they were able to achieve a transparent view of change at Keele. There was a shared positive sentiment towards Keele's steps to decolonise. "I'm quite satisfied with whatever institutional steps are being taken. It's incremental, but I guess that's how institutions change incrementally, so baby steps are welcome." (MSA, 2nd year international student, interview). As proffered by MSA, change within the institution must be incremental; cultural changes are made up of the everyday interaction and activity of those who try to resist the normative structures of the university (Bhambra et al., 2018; Mbembe, 2016; Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

5.2.2. *Chipping away at the old block*

When interviewing a member of senior management at Keele University, change was a central theme, particularly the idea of how change is constructed in the institutional systems that DTC attempts to challenge. When asked ‘Do you feel like you can make change at Keele?’, the participant responded with a level of positivity but acknowledged that big change could not be achieved overnight. “Yes, yes, I do feel like I can make change. Maybe not the big changes. I think those big changes take time through the smaller alterations” (SH, Senior management, interview). There have been clear DTC changes at Keele whilst many of these can be deemed as small alterations, they represent a future where DTC change has become a pillar of the university’s ethos.

The idea of smaller alterations and big changes evokes the conceptualisation of Berger and Luckman’s (1966) construction of social realities. They highlight that structural change is challenging to achieve in the University institution as it is made up of an embedded and shared sense of reality. This reality is maintained by the everyday interactions that construct the space and norms within. According to this theory, more minor change is easier to effect within institutional spaces as it presents less of a direct challenge. They write that institutions are simultaneously normative and sites of resistance (Berger & Luckman, 1966). The smaller alterations that SH described are indicative of the everyday interactions that construct the reality of the university. At the same time, they are subject to change due to our role in their construction. Maldonado-Torres et al. (2018) reiterate the idea that DTC change involves addressing the “institutional orders and day-to-day practices that allow Eurocentrism and white male heteronormativity to dominate the discipline” (p65). The day-to-day practices and everyday interactions can be utilised to challenge the eurocentrism and coloniality in the modern university.

Another example of the change at Keele was noted in an interview. “I think a big shift and a positive one is we have [redacted] who's our new academic, DTC lead. I think that's a good shift. So, we've got somebody who is like named and is a lead of this and then [redacted] has created like a subgroup committee...So hopefully that will bring in some structure where we've not had any before”. (SH, Senior management, interview). Staff involved with DTC at Keele are utilising tools such as DTC systems to chip away at the hegemonic colonial systems of the University with the hope that structural change will follow. Structural change is necessary to decolonise the western university, and in doing so, space can be made for marginalised people, knowledges, and epistemologies, which, according to Bhabra et al. (2018), can lead to a “global infrastructure of anti-colonial connectivity” (p3). Creating this infrastructure relies on the transformative action of individuals within the university who champion DTC. This newly constructed system can then be managed and developed

through the everyday interactions of those choosing to create a new shared social reality (Vera, 2016).

The participant from the SU's perception of change differed from that of senior management. This is to be expected, as the hierarchical system offers greater transparency to those higher in its structures. However, it is crucial to understand the multitude of perspectives regarding the construction of change at Keele. When asked, "So I'm thinking about general change at Keele. What changes have you seen since you've been aware of decolonization?", the participant articulated that they have not seen much change at the university. "I guess fundamentally a surface level. I don't think there has been much change. I think that moving internally, schools have started these working groups. They've probably diversified their reading lists a little more, but I don't think there's been any systemic change" (MJ, SU, interview). This highlights the idea that cultural change is ambiguous and difficult, especially within the institutional systems of the university.

There are differing opinions concerning what constitutes DTC change at Keele, which is ultimately a barrier to DTC initiatives. Shain et al. (2021) note that decolonising the university is a "contested terrain" (p13). This is in relation to its understanding, as they write that "decolonising involves a multitude of definitions, interpretations, aims and strategies within and across a number of universities in the UK" (Shain et al., 2021, p1). The contestation surrounding DTC should also be extended to DTC change (small and structural), where there is no agreed-upon understanding of what change should look like and how fast it must be attained.

The contested terrain of DTC is further emphasised by the participants from the grassroots decolonising network at Keele. They articulate that top-down decolonising initiatives at Keele do not represent change by their definition. "So, when you talk about a university-wide movement of decolonizing, it's, you know, I always just get very bitter about it and you know other members that have done this work still carry that trauma 2-3 years later" (TS, PhD student, interview). There was evident unease about the change that has taken root at the Keele. This is representative of contested understandings of change at the university. The frictions between the grassroots DKN and the top-down DTC initiative indicate the messiness of change. The mentioning of trauma in this work can be understood in Bhabra et al. (2018): "trauma is often an entry point into understanding these issues and can be an introductory way of communicating how these structures come to light" (p33). The participant's description of trauma and bitterness in doing DTC work and not seeing the change they would like reaffirms that DTC change is contested even between those attempting to deliver it.

5.3. Barriers

Within this research, students and experts shared their perceived barriers to DTC at Keele. Whilst there was some overlap between Keele's challenges and the wider literature, it was evident that the specificity of DTC at Keele and its facilitators had different opinions of the greatest barriers. These barriers have been divided into two main areas. Firstly, 'understanding' were widespread issues for students and institutional (mis)understanding of DTC. A lack of understanding is a challenge for DTC as it impedes widespread engagement and adoption. Secondly, among all student participants emerged the idea of 'Tokenism'. They explored how DTC within their schools seemed more like a gesture than a meaningful change.

5.3.1. *Understanding*

One participant discussed how "it's important not to conflate DTC with EDI too much because you don't want it to be common. One of those side projects because no, it's a core academic issue and it's an academic issue for everybody, not those with just protected characteristics." (SH, senior management, BAME, interview). The idea can be seen in the wider literature (Gopal, 2021; Bhambra et al., 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2012). It highlights that understanding DTC is inherently complex and emotionally charged at Keele and more broadly (Liyanage, 2020).

Conflating DTC with other anti-racist work does not benefit either initiative; this can only benefit the settler and colonial systems they want to perpetuate. Tuck and Yang (2012) reiterate the idea that decolonisation is radical and that to "Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks" (p3).

One expert participant mentioned institutional understanding of DTC as a barrier to decolonising efforts at Keele. A lack of understanding led to unrealistic time frames and scoping of DTC "I remember seeing the email from [Keele leadership] waffling, saying, saying [they] wanted decolonising the curriculum to be complete in a year" (MD, Academic, white, interview). This suggests that Keele's leadership does not fully comprehend how decolonising a curriculum can be achieved. Whilst this, in many ways, is understandable, as how DTC should be delivered is largely contested, it also highlights the unrealistic metrics of the university.

DTC is an iterative and critical self-reflexive process. Large-scale cultural change like this cannot take place and be completed in an institutional space within such a time frame. Mbembe (2016) notes that some decolonising change can be immediate: "it does not take

nine months to change the names of buildings, to change the iconography, the economy of symbols whose force is to create or induce particular states of humiliation; pictures or images that mentally harass Black students on an everyday basis because these students know whom these images represent” (p30). While this idea is set in the South African HE context, the core idea can be applied to Keele’s response to DTC. Colonially rooted emblems and histories can be acknowledged and changed within a year, but the epistemological foundation of the university cannot be dismantled quite so quickly.

The expert participant from the SU provided an interesting perspective in the broader student body’s understanding of DTC. The SU has a more direct relationship with the students at Keele and can, therefore, provide insight into how and why student’s understanding is developed: “but then I think a large part of the student population don’t understand what decolonizing is, misunderstand it in a way, or just don’t have a clue what it is.” (MJ, SU, white, interview).

This suggests that many students have no understanding of DTC, regardless of its implementation across all the Keele schools since 2020. Ultimately, the student populations’ lack of understanding is a barrier to DTC progress at Keele. This barrier is particularly relevant for white students, who do not experience the marginalisation of colonised curriculums. According to Shahjahan et al. (2022), this can result in “majoritized student groups” posing a “resistance to challenging mainstream knowledge” (p25). This resistance to DTC action can in part, be addressed by a greater understanding of what DTC aims to dismantle (Sian, 2019; Fellner, 2018).

Student participant JT demonstrates how students from the majority ethnic group can misunderstand DTC and pose as resistance to its efforts. They describe their first encounter with DTC from a SU newsletter in 2018; “Why on earth would anyone want to do this? Is this some stupid rubbish which some idiotic like culture person came up with?” (JT, master’s student, white, interview). Whilst this was not a common barrier for engagement across the participants, it is likely representative of a concerningly large proportion of students at Keele. The use of the term ‘culture person’ was for a person of colour; the participant initially believed that DTC was a solely race and representation issue and, therefore, should not be widely implemented across Keele. This builds on the idea that some students feel that DTC infringes on academic freedoms.

According to Grange (2020) the “preservation of colonial academic organisation was also done under the guise of academic freedom and institutional autonomy” (p218), suggesting that concerns over academic freedom detract from DTC efforts and only maintain the colonially rooted status quo. Whilst this is not indicative of all student sentiments, it poses a

very real barrier for DTC work. It causes friction between student populations and can widen entrenched differences between cultural experiences.

Student participant JT notes that their political and ideological beliefs coloured their understanding of DTC at first. “When I first started university, I didn’t understand the point of decolonising the curriculum, I was at the time right leaning and just about starting down the alt-right pathway which is an incredibly dangerous road to go down. As a result, I thought anything that disrupted the white, patriarchal status quo at the time was pointless” (JT, master’s student, white, reflexive diary).

JT’s previous misunderstanding of DTC manifested through “expressing guilt, anger, frustration, and/or other intense emotions” (Shahjahan et al., 2022, p26). The emotional response to DTC and pervasive misunderstanding of it from white students suggests that student understanding is a considerable barrier to exacting change. Nevertheless, JT’s reflection on their initial beliefs suggests that through meaningful exposure to differences and educational support, Keele can change perspectives.

In the interview JT described why their perspective on DTC changed through their time at Keele, citing wider exposure to students from diverse backgrounds and specific modules within their undergraduate course. This suggests that students were overwhelmingly aware of issues of social injustice and are, therefore, receptive to DTC. Whilst this is true in the literature surrounding student activism that has been driving DTC work in western universities (Gopal, 2021; Bhabra et al., 2018), it highlights a lack of nuance in its understanding. Students from a ‘prejudiced background’ can change and develop their understanding. It requires the right methods of dissemination and support. “I am naturally very open to it though, especially after taking [redacted] post-colonial module and personally discussing the DTC issues within Keele University with [redacted] (JT, master’s student, white, interview),

A decolonised module supported JT in their journey from self-proclaimed right-wing views to a more nuanced understanding of the social world. This indicates that DTC at Keele has the power to change perspectives and that the university wide initiatives are successful for some. Zinga and Styres (2019) iterate the power and importance of decolonised pedagogies for challenging assumptions and bias in students. They describe that pedagogies of resistance create a framework whereby students can experience new perspectives of the world. This reframing of the world is described as “an officially defined ‘world’ splitting open” (Greene, 2003, p86). This, according to Zinga and Styres (2019), exposes students to the “plurality of unexpected truths” (p39).

5.3.2. *Tokenism*

Another barrier to DTC work that emerged from the data within this research was the idea of tokenistic change. Tokenism is defined as “symbolic gestures; these techniques might give the appearance of reconciliation in the classroom, but they are inauthentic and do little to create transformative change” (Cooper et al., 2018, p55).

In an interview with student MSA, they described that international students did not feel able to engage with DTC work at Keele due to a mistrust of the university. “There is a sort of, I mean, a pessimism” (MSA, 2nd year international student, interview). This attitude towards the university resulted from institutional barriers for international students and uncertainty that the DTC efforts would amount to meaningful change. They continued to say, “additionally, the lack of wider participation by students indicates there is a conscious or even sub-conscious understanding of that superficiality leading to a belief of futility regarding participation in DTC.” (MSA, 2nd year international student, reflexive diary)

In the case of this study, the researcher examined how the risk of tokenism and superficial change was a challenge to DTC work. However, according to the quotation from MSA, the risk of superficial changes is a barrier to international students (and students more broadly). Perhaps the issue of tokenism is a result of “the ease with which the language of decolonization has been superficially adopted into education and other social sciences” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p2). The ease noted by Tuck and Yang (2012) implies that DTC negates coloniality's radical and complex histories. The superficial agenda of some of the staff-student working groups at Keele is indicative of a detachment from the radical agenda of decolonisation to better fit within the structures of the modern university.

The idea of token change also emerged from another student interview, as decolonised reading lists were the focus of discussion. “I think we need to be really careful when we decolonise reading lists because it can't be tokenism” (FSA, 2nd year student, white, interview). This participant notes that some attempts to decolonise reading lists within their school can come across as a token gesture. Whilst decolonising reading lists at Keele is a step in the right direction, it is not indicative of systemic change more broadly.

MSA discussed a similar experience with their schools working group. Decolonising and diversifying appeared to be used interchangeably in their experience of these working groups, which only emphasises the issue of tokenistic change. “The work discussed was in the context of inclusivity. Discussed including a bank of journal articles by native academics in the Keele Library” (MSA, 2nd year international student, interview). While a greater diversity of authors and knowledge on module reading lists would be welcomed by students at Keele, this seems to be the extent of their involvement with DTC through the working groups. This is

a limited use of students as co-producers of DTC at Keele, who can contribute to greater progress than simply adding people of colour to their required reading.

Diversifying and decolonising reading lists is a valuable change for DTC; according to Bhabra et al. (2018) this can challenge “Eurocentric domination and lack of diversity in curricula across UK universities” (p2). However, they also examine how there can be a preoccupation with diversification instead of interrogating the colonial structures of the university. “While decolonisation and reparations within educational delivery have been implemented on my course, it often feels tokenary” (FSA, 2nd year student, white, interview). This participant reflected on how decolonisation had been taking place on their undergraduate course. Whilst they did acknowledge a change in academic delivery, they still felt that these efforts were tokenistic.

They emphasised this concern in the following quotation. “Where decolonisation is, seems sort of tacked on at the end a little bit more?” (FSA, 2nd year student, white, interview). Gestural changes such as increased diversity and representation do not provoke Keele’s systems that perpetuate coloniality. It is, therefore, unsurprising that students at Keele mistrust the institution’s motivation for change. This idea is also proffered by Bhabra et al. (2018) “simply diversifying the field is not sufficient; it requires a more thoroughgoing decolonisation of ‘structural problems and deep-seated habits” (p7). Based on the student perceptions; Keele must overcome the perceived tokenistic change and fully embed decolonisation systemically.

5.4. Institutional power

It is necessary to examine the power of the university as an institution from the perspectives of students at Keele and across the university’s hierarchy. This theme is divided into two main subsections. Firstly, ‘non-performativity’ is defined as the institution acting on issues of social injustice with gestural measures that are inherently insidious, as they do not lead to meaningful structural change. Non-performativity within the institution can be seen as a misdirection of language, action, and phenomena that do not address the systemic. However, it maintains the semblance of institutional acceptance through the superficial. Often, it comes in response to calls for reform, which, according to Phipps and McDonnell (2021), “can easily be placated by producing a report or policy, commissioning training, or other measures” (p516). Secondly, ‘Knowledge’, its production, and its dissemination is a central tenet of decolonising efforts; DTC attempts to challenge Eurocentric epistemologies within the institution. Shain et al. (2021) articulate this as “Western education was, and is still, a key site through which colonialism, and colonial knowledge, is produced, institutionalised and naturalised” (p921).

5.4.1. *Non-Performativity*

JT discusses the motivation of top-down DTC approaches at Keele; there is an evident uncertainty about the intentions of the university. They cite that perhaps “They’re doing it for maybe like the PR” (JT, master’s student, white, interview).

This suggests that the university is perhaps taking up DTC for marketing and metrics purposes (described as PR in the quotation). Capital gains as a motivation for decolonial work are inherently at odds with the tenets of DTC and decolonisation more broadly (Shahjahan et al., 2022). This motivation perhaps drives the ‘mission objectives’ of DTC at Keele more so than the academic foundation of the movement. Gopal (2021) highlights that “the project at hand might be driven less by intellectual imperative than market segment satisfaction” (p877). They are proffering the idea that efforts to decolonise institutionally are directed by the neo-liberal marketisation of HE instead of genuine intent to undo systems of marginalisation and epistemic violence (Dei, 2019). Grange et al. (2020) build on this idea and rearticulate it as ‘decolonial washing’, defined as “all instances in which decolonisation is used as a metaphor, whether deliberately or in ignorance” (p43). JT’s perceptions suggest that Keele’s DTC motivations are more aligned with neoliberal sentiments of gain than Grange et al.’s (2020) understanding. ‘Decolonial washing,’ much like its inspiration ‘green washing,’ is rarely taken seriously and is perhaps just a facet of institutional performativity.

The commercialisation of HE and the implication this has on efforts to decolonise was also discussed by student participants. “When it gets to a point where people higher up realise that this is something that can make or break somebody’s decision at a university, that’s when there’ll be change. Because we’re already here. Money talks” (FSA, 2nd year student, white, interview). ‘Money talks’ is a stark reminder that HE is a lucrative business, and that institutional structures are not simply in place to produce knowledge but to commodify it. This has wider implications that DTC change will not be meaningful at Keele until a lack of decolonising manifests into financial losses. Another participant reiterates this sentiment. “You have to show to them how this is gonna benefit them financially.” (MJ, SU, white, interview). Ultimately, this shines light on Keele’s primary motivation to decolonise being, according to the participants in this research, money.

Monetary motivations are, perhaps, already becoming reality. Mbembe (2016) examines how the neo-liberal HE system treats students as consumers, not of knowledge but of the commodification of knowledge. He writes, “The task of the university from then on is to make them happy as customers” (p31). Whilst students are concerned with job prospects and their futures, there is an increasing value of decolonisation from student populations (Mbembe,

2016). This could result in decolonial reform within the university. A less idealistic approach would highlight how the pervasive system of neo-liberal HE would move to performative decolonisation measures as these do not threaten the status quo.

Student participant FSA posits: “I think that change will only come when very high-ranking officials in the university, maybe they’re walking round on a university open day and somebody asks about decolonisation work and they don’t quite know how to answer it and somebody goes oh that’s not enough, I’m not coming to this university” (FSA, 2nd year student, white, interview). Shain et al. (2021) describe this as strategic advancement, whereby universities uptake DTC work due to the pressure to recruit and retain students in the economic and cultural context of a post-Brexit UK. Leading to the idea that reform or meaningful change can only take place at Keele when (and if) DTC started to impact wider student recruitment. They write that this can lead to “an institutional taming or a dilution of the discourse, especially when top-down initiatives and strategies are pursued while leaving intact the structures and processes that perpetuate coloniality” (p921). This builds on the idea of non-performative action within HE as it maintains the superficial gestures without addressing the systemic issues.

5.4.2. *Knowledge*

There is a complex discrepancy between scholarly knowledge at Keele and the foundation on which this knowledge is created. “There is a real mismatch between ‘let’s decolonize this area of academic endeavour and knowledge’, and then also ‘let’s have really rigorously designed, transparent, accountable, robust research.’ Then you got areas where just the ontological assumptions that the whole subject is found at all are deeply problematic” (MD, Academic, white, interview).

This demonstrates the complexities for academic disciplines at Keele to unlearn their colonially rooted ontologies and epistemologies. According to MD these can often be at odds with the western concept of rigorous research. This is a challenge for DTC at Keele as unlearning disciplinary canon threatens the homogenising knowledge-power relationship that privileges knowledge from the centre (Shahjahan et al., 2022; Mbembe, 2016). Bhabra et al. (2018) writes that DTC seeks to challenge the “epistemological authority assigned uniquely to the Western university as the privileged site of knowledge production” (p3) and to partake in the decolonisation more broadly through provocations and interventions from the metropole.

The mismatch between decolonisation and academic knowledge production that MD highlighted in their interview was also discussed by MJ Their perspective as a non-academic mediates their experience and understanding of how DTC challenges scholarly knowledge.

“That they're still at stage of not just understanding why we should be doing it, the why we should decolonise” (MJ, SU, interview). This quotation is in reference to science at Keele, who are notably less involved in DTC than other disciplines. There is a belief within these disciplines that, as they do not directly engage with people or culture, they are exempt from efforts to decolonise.

The epistemological foundations are rooted in colonial ideologies and the exploitation of the Other for institutional gains. In the interview, MJ expands on this issue at Keele, describing that natural sciences, chemistry and physical sciences are predominantly “overrun by rich, white men” (MJ, SU, white, interview). They note that some subjects are more receptive to DTC than others. This correlates with the wider staff engagement at Keele, with some schools developing the staff-student working groups and other strategies whilst some are still at a discussion stage.

The perception of schools like chemistry and physical sciences demonstrated that whiteness and the lack of diversity reduces the engagement in initiatives like DTC. It is challenging to garner engagement from schools that are overwhelmingly “pale, male (and often stale)” (Bhambra et al., 2018, p6). This is indicative of the institution more broadly that historically has, and continues to, marginalise voices that are not from a privileged group.

The student participants focused on diverse knowledge within their course instead of university-level knowledge production. “When different techniques and theories are discussed, often the non-Eurocentric information is not presented chronologically as part of a global narrative but instead is tacked onto the end of content on that topic, whether as part of the same lecture or forming a decolonisation specific lecture.” (FSA, 2nd year student, white, interview). Students at Keele are aware that their learning is largely eurocentric and demonstrate the desire to change the knowledge they are exposed to. According to this participant, decolonised knowledges are peripheralised within their course, not to the extent that they do not exist, but are utilised as a signal or gesture of DTC work. This suggests a perpetuation of the practices “which provincialise forms of European knowledge production from the centre” (Bhambra et al., 2018, p3).

Another knowledge-related issue that the student participants noted was, again, related to a lack of diversity. “It’s been very difficult for students to find articles that aren’t written by men who are white” (TA, 2nd year student, BAME, interview). This highlights the pervasive problem of whiteness at the centre of western scholarship and Keele’s curriculum design. Students cannot see themselves reflected in their disciplines they study.

According to Bhambra et al. (2018), “subjects of Western scholarship are enduringly pale, male (and often stale); where people of colour do appear, they are all too often tokenistically

represented, spoken on behalf of, or reduced to objects of scholarship.” Although there is an overlap between token gestures and diversifying reading lists, these quotes represent the greater challenge of privileging non-western and non-white knowledge in the canon and classrooms at Keele.

An additional participant voiced a similar opinion about the importance of being able to see the diversity within their curriculum, suggesting that “It's sort of our responsibility to engage most with this because we're the ones benefiting from it” (FSA, 2nd year student, white, interview). As a white student, they can see reflections of themselves in those who contribute to and produce knowledge legitimised within the university. This research highlights that students at Keele feel that there is a collective responsibility for the majority ethnic groups to engage with DTC change, as they are complicit in the system that excludes so many. This idea can be seen in the work of Shahjahan et al. (2022) who writes “how can we decolonize the curriculum when such alternative knowledge systems are unavailable in terms of experts, content, and research, and/or does not count in the global arena of knowledge?” (p24).

5.5. Student power

Student empowerment plays a central role in disrupting the normative and exclusionary structures of the university. Students across the global south have been demanding decolonial change from their institutions (Gopal, 2021; Meda, 2020). Within the UK context, students have again played a key role in advancing the agenda of DTC, such as the Rhodes must fall Oxford movement (Gebrial, 2018). However, beyond the student activism involved in DTC, there is limited research about the students who co-produce DTC alongside institutional initiatives. This section will explore the student voices at Keele and their perspectives on the power they possess. Firstly, ‘Institutional response’ will explore the hierarchical response to student calls to decolonise. Whilst student activism is no longer the driving force of DTC at Keele, it did play a central role in forcing the university to listen and ultimately act. Secondly, ‘centring student voices’ student participants reflect on how their opinions and voices are heard (or unheard) within the institutional structures designed for them (Fataar, 2018). There is limited literature surrounding students’ voices within DTC in UK HE. Thirdly, ‘students as co-producers’ participants shared their experiences of power and collaboration to exact DTC within the staff-student working groups.

5.5.1. Institutional response

This research exposes how Keele responded to student calls for decolonisation as an institution. A participant reflected on a tactic from DKN, which penned an open letter to the university which called out the university’s shallow engagement with DTC. They note that it “was to call out sort of the shallow engagement, it led to things like the real decolonising work

and the school groups. So, it was a powerful letter” (TS, PhD student, BAME, interview). Student activism at Keele demonstrates the student population's power and ability to demand change from the institution. This arguably threatens the normative flows of power within the university and could be why the university responded to the activism with a top-down approach to decolonise.

Shain et al. (2021) examine how universities strategically reject student calls to decolonise. They described the tactics: “The first was to ignore or refuse to engage with decolonising work. In some cases, management-led initiatives were introduced without consultation with existing decolonising networks” (p930). This is reminiscent of DKN’s experience at Keele, where the institution rejected student demand to decolonise and eventually created its own top-down initiative.

The staff-student working groups within schools were initially a strategy proffered by the student activists at Keele. One participant noted that “it was an idea that originally came from that first year” (TS, PhD student, BAME, interview). After this, they discussed how the idea was adopted by the university and imposed on them (DKN) as if they had not proffered the idea in the first place. Whilst these issues are not part of Keele’s decolonising present, they represent the struggle of students who demand change and do not feel listened to. Students offer accountability, an image of the future for the university, and, therefore, should be better utilised as co-producers of this future.

Instead of capitalising on student co-production, Keele's focus was on how the students’ message was conveyed instead of the message itself. Shain et al. (2021, p934) suggest that this is a method to “distract from the structural issues of injustice; it also reasserts the power, dominance and Whiteness of the institution by prioritising the psychological discomfort of the (White senior male) audience.” The demands of student activists are loud, and the proliferation of social media can gain traction at a high rate. The institution cannot easily silence their voices.

Following the framework purported by Shain et al. (2021), Keele is now at a place of strategic advancement in its DTC progress. This is exemplified by a participant’s response to the following question: ‘how do you think [students] feel about these DTC initiatives coming from university?’ “I think they'd be generally positive about it because I think it's, you know, it shows that the university is listening to students” (SH, Senior management, BAME, interview). The university is now listening to student voices, yet it took the sustained efforts of student (and staff) activists to achieve this. Strategic advancement is defined as “a more proactive strategy driven by a need for the institution to be “seen to be responsive in the face of wider pressures and social changes” (Shain et al., 2021 p931).

According to participants, this advancement at Keele was primarily driven by the university's response to societal catalysts such as the Black Lives Matter movement and the Covid19 pandemic. This can lead to the idea that universities see DTC as a means of capitalising on students' increased calls for social justice, as seen in a paper from Sian (2019). Sian (2019) noted that decolonising initiatives could be commodified to recruit future students instead of transforming systemic issues in the university.

5.5.2. Centring student voices

There is a dichotomy between institutional responses to student demands and students feeling heard within the university. At Keele, there seems to be a stark imbalance between the two. Institutional approaches to DTC, such as creating staff-student working groups and appointing an academic DTC, suggest that Keele is listening to the calls for change. Nevertheless, the participants' responses in this study suggest that their voices are still silent within these systems. "I do feel like it is sometimes hard for us as students to get our voices heard irrespective of the systems are put in place to ensure that our voices are being heard, especially like the voice rep system. It is a system for students to have their voices heard but it's just as often dismissed" (TA, 2nd year student, BAME, Focus group).

This participant expands on their experiences of not feeling listened to by the university, explaining that they have worked hard within their role as a student rep to exact change for their cohort. Saying that "it's not easy because a lot of lecturers, they'll listen to what's being said, but we can never really see any changes" (TA, 2nd year student, BAME, interview). This is part of a broader barrier to DTC, as students are like fleeting travellers through modules; they are unable to see if their suggestions have been implemented the following year. Again, the lack of communication between students who co-produce DTC and the student population more broadly suggests that the systems of disseminating change at Keele are not suitable. This would reduce the hostile experience of not being taken seriously in spaces where students are asked for their views such, as the DTC working groups and SSVC. This participant noted that they would like "to be taken seriously for once. But I feel like we haven't been taken seriously as students" (TA, 2nd year student, BAME, interview).

Whilst there is evidence that Keele is taking students' views seriously, the disconnect between the institution and the student is increasing. The lack of oversight to change is cited as a barrier to DTC endeavours and continually marginalises students. Students who are engaging with the systems that the university has designed for them. In the focus group, the participants discussed how they were glad that changes were taking place at Keele, but the disconnect between student committees and staff made them reconsider if their engagement in these spaces was worth it. The systems for student engagement at Keele are not always

conducive to empowering students; at times, they do not feel like a place for true collaboration. Students must be able to co-produce DTC at Keele; their role is not to design curriculums or to legitimise knowledge but to hold staff accountable for exclusionary environments and knowledge within these spaces.

5.5.3. *Students as co-producers*

Within the systems and spaces for DTC co-production at Keele, such as the SSVc and DTC working groups, there is an emerging idea that students do not feel that they have any power. When asking a participant, 'Would you say that you feel like you have equal power in that environment to the staff?', they answered with a definitive "No". Later, they expanded on this: "the idea that you're meant to be co-collaborators and will be able to voice an opinion on it, but in fact that's not necessarily working in practice" (TA, 2nd year student, BAME, interview). Power within these spaces can never truly be equal; academic staff possess the ability to legitimise knowledge and dictate how students utilise the space. However, within the scope of DTC, students are integral in co-producing change within the university. This implies that there is (or should be) an even distribution of power between staff and students. The reality at Keele is that there is not an equal exchange between the two groups.

Across the study participants did not feel like they had any power within the spaces designed by Keele for their voices to be heard. When discussing whether students had any real power to make a change at Keele, a participant responded with another clear "No" (MSA, 2nd year international student, interview). This was reiterated by another participant when discussing a student's ability to make change within the SSVc. "I'd like to say yes, but in reality, I'd probably say no, probably not" (JT, master's student, white, interview).

According to Bhambra et al. (2018), student empowerment is a key component of DTC, yet the practice of decolonising universities does not reflect this. Shahjahan et al. (2022) reiterate the importance of student engagement in DTC, yet note that how they (students) perceive and understand DTC change in institutions is missing from the literature. This suggests that student voices are undervalued in the DTC debate within the UK context. There has been a transition from the student activism that drove change in 2018 to the institutional approaches. These approaches neglect the student's voices and ability to contribute to DTC change within the university.

In the focus group, the student participants reflected on why they feel like their voice is often unheard in spaces for collaboration. They discussed how the relationship with staff in these spaces is mostly positive, yet they do not feel like their views and concerns are taken seriously. This suggests that student involvement with top-down DTC approaches is largely superficial. In comparison. Shahjahan et al., (2022) articulate that students are welcomed as

co-producers of knowledge in the classroom and strategies such as student-led curricula discussions can progress decolonial classrooms.

The expert participants were also questioned about student co-production with DTC change at Keele. “You know what? I've never actually sat in on one of these groups, so maybe that's something that I need to do and maybe have a look at is actually sit on, sit in on one and see how it works. I'd like to think they have [power]” (SH, Senior management, BAME, interview). This was a positive response as the participant recognised that they did not have much oversight in the DTC working groups, and perhaps they needed to rectify that. They continued to say “you need students to co-create, so I really hope they are. And if they're not, I hope they can tell me about it”. Whilst there are evidently staff who care about the student's role in DTC, this is a clear example of a lack of transparency in the system. Senior management are outsiders to the working groups and are unable to know if students are being treated as co-creators or passive bystanders.

There was further discussion surrounding the staff-student working groups at Keele, with one participant noting that there is strong work arising from some schools. This appears limited to schools with particularly passionate staff and students, and they were aware that with was not the norm within the university. “I think for a lot of schools they'll probably have a DTC working group and it's almost just a token” (MJ, SU, white, interview). This demonstrates the disconnect between the tenets of DTC where students are centred in exacting change and the reality of changing an institution.

5.6. Race and DTC

There is a complex and entangled relationship between DTC and race, where the two are intrinsically connected and simultaneously distinct. Shain et al. (2021) write that “Decolonise movements are shaped in each locale both by histories of anti-colonial struggles and by the conditions facing racialised groups in the contemporary moment” (p923). This reflects the lived experience of people of colour, who are largely marginalised by colonised curriculums and the coloniality at the core of the university. As Tuck and Yang (2012) eloquently write, however, decolonisation is not a metaphor for other forms of social injustice.

Issues of race and, in particular, racism, vastly diverges from the scope of DTC and decolonisation more broadly. Therefore, this research will not include general experiences of racism at Keele. It is important to highlight that students did report on racism outside the classroom, with one participant discussing, “But I believed racism was over, but I then I came here [Keele], and my re-education was so fast I have whiplash” (MSA, 2nd year international student, interview). Nevertheless, there is an overlap between race, racism, and DTC issues. Experiences of racism within the classroom are inherently DTC as they are directly a result of

colonised classrooms, epistemologies, and canon. It is often the motivation for individuals to get involved with DTC work.

This section provides an overview of 'Keele and race', which is essential to understanding how issues of race and DTC are perpetuated across the institution. Following this, 'Intersect between race and DTC' will explore the ambiguous relations between racism and DTC at Keele. The racial motivations 'on doing the work' will highlight how race drives DTC work within the university.

5.6.1. Keele and race

It is important to provide an overview of Keele university and its relationship with race. Staff participants in this research noted that "we don't necessarily have a lot of diversity on the Keele campus" with some key areas such as HR that is "being run by a group of like Staffordshire white ladies" (MD, Academic, white, interview). Those within the systems of power at Keele do not always understand the experience and needs of staff (and students) from minority or international backgrounds.

There is a lack of genuine representation across all facets of Keele. It is rare for students of colour to see themselves represented in the faculty, especially regarding high levels of seniority. This is not limited to academic and ancillary staff. "It's no secret with five white officers, it's like we can't speak for these students because we don't experience what they experience on a day-to-day basis" (MJ, SU, white, interview). The participant from the SU is critical of the prevalence of whiteness through the structures of Keele. Allyship and a level of self-reflection can mitigate against the marginalising systems of power within the university.

5.6.2. Intersect between race and DTC

A participant shared their experience of feeling marginalised because of their race in the classroom at Keele. This is a strong example of how racism and race intersect with DTC issues. They describe how one lecturer would not make eye contact with them even when directly addressing the participant in a lecture. They recall how, when asking a question about their feedback, the lecturer responded to other (white) students instead of the participant. They describe these as microaggressions but were hesitant to blame the incidents on their race. "I do not wanna say that it is because of that reason [race], but then again, I'm like one of the few people that look like me in that lab" (HR, 1st year student, BAME, interview). Instead, they expressed an uncertainty about the motivations of the lecturer as to why they would treat a student in this way, suggesting that "they kind of made me feel a bit like, weird" (HR, 1st year student, BAME, interview). They cited reasons such as

unconscious bias as the motivating factor for the marginalisation they experience in their classroom.

Sardar (2008) describes how whiteness and white canon can facilitate the everyday experience of racism and marginalisation. Students recognise the patterns of exclusions in the classroom and can offer insight into the everyday experiences of students of colour navigating these largely white spaces. The description of microaggressions within the classroom space at Keele left the participant feeling othered and excluded. These are often covert and subtle forms of discrimination. This is inherently a DTC issue and should not be limited to an anti-racist initiative in the university such as the SU's 'Do better, be better' campaign.

The experience described by HR highlighted that a sense of belonging in the classroom at Keele is an enduring issue. There is a proliferation of white, Eurocentric canon with UK HE; according to Arday et al., (2020) this can adversely impact BAME students. It was ultimately impacting their engagement and sense of belonging, which can be addressed by inclusive classrooms and learning (Moncrieffe et al., 2019).

Experiences of microaggressions are difficult to report on and address within the systems of reporting at Keele. Microaggressions and exclusionary curricula do not fit the typical perspectives of racism and can therefore be difficult to convey to staff members. This suggests that the systems designed to protect students are sometimes inadequate. DTC challenges the systems of power and knowledge within the university, the systems in which the student's voice is (un)heard needs to be reformed. According to Shilliam (2015), this is symptomatic of the university's deep-rooted institutional racism and coloniality.

Issues of race and DTC were a recurring theme in the discussions with participants. When asked, "Compared to your white course mates, do you feel that you are treated differently on your course?", one participant responded with "I feel like sometimes they get listened to a bit more. When we've raised concerns, I guess it feels like we aren't really listened to as much as our like white counterparts" (TA, 2nd year student, BAME, interview). This participant's experience indicates that whiteness and privilege are at the centre of educational institutions (Arday et al., 2021).

Another participant reflected on their time at Keele as an international student. They describe how they are "literally on the margins. I may have a good personal working relationship with my professors, but that's it" (MSA, 2nd year international student, interview). Their lack of social capital with the university and the UK means they were limited to superficial social encounters. They noted, "I can't break the superficial level, how am I going to reach the decolonial conversation?" (MSA, 2nd year international student, interview). Decolonising

initiatives have become increasingly important for universities as a strategy to recruit international students (Shain et al., 2021). However, this research suggests that demonstrations of racial parity through DTC and other anti-racist initiatives is not enough to create genuine belonging for international students.

5.6.3. *On doing the work*

Student participants from BAME backgrounds all shared experiences of racism and a lack of belonging at Keele. One described how “a lot of students who are from ethnic backgrounds just don’t really feel represented” (TA, 2nd year student, BAME, interview). There is a lack of representation in curricula and staffing at Keele. Even within DTC at Keele, the lack of representation is noticeable to students. Taylor et al. (2009) note that the omission of bodies of colour and the knowledge they possess beyond the dominant, white, western canon denies student of colour their identity, history, and meaningful representation. According to Arday (2020), there have been calls for students of colour to become more engaging in decolonising curricula design, yet this is not reflective of the experience of BAME students Keele. They write that “existing curricula must be cognizant and reflective of the ever-increasing diverse student populations” (Arday, 2020, p10).

Whilst there are calls for diverse students and staff to participate in DTC, this research suggests that students of colour can feel isolated within the university-led approaches to decolonise. Diversity within the staff-student working groups at Keele was a common issue for participants. “The one thing that I did mention in my diary, the fact that when we did have the meeting, I was only person of colour” (HR, 1st year student, BAME, interview). This was not an isolated experience for the participant.

“I noticed that in the meeting that took place for the finalising of the survey, I was the only member who was from an ethnic minority background” (HR, 1st year student, BAME, interview). They said this doesn’t necessarily take away from the importance of DTC work in their school, but instead suggests that there is a lack of engagement from students of colour. This is perhaps a result of issues of coloniality in the university disproportionately impacting BAME populations. The relatively small proportion of staff of colour at only 9% in 2019/20 (Keele, 2020) and a high attainment gap of 14.5% for BAME students (Keele, 2021) mean that there are broader engagement and representation issues at the university.

Participants in the focus group discussed how DTC was for everyone, regardless of race. However, students of colour noted that it could be hard to make white students understand the marginalising experiences of colonial curricula. “I feel like it would be quite difficult to kind of make them understand like the sort of things that people of colour go through if they’ve never really been through it themselves” (TA, 2nd year student, BAME, Focus group). Arday

et al. (2021) writes that the decolonising agenda must be situated in a discourse that extends beyond benefitting people of colour. Everyone can benefit from diverse knowlegdes, practices and epistemologies. The knowledge within HE should reflect the multi-faceted and multicultural society in the UK.

Racial experiences and DTC overlap in this research, those who experience the exclusionary patterns of a colonial institution are aware of the systems that were not designed for them to thrive. Participants reflected on experiences of racism and othering; whilst not all of these were under the remit of DTC, they indicate a pattern of anti-racist initiatives driven by people of colour. Students were concerned about the uneven weight of these issues resting on the (mainly female) staff of colour. This is indicative of a wider society where “the burden of this labour as historically this has fallen on people of colour, particularly women of colour” (Arday et al., 2021, p11).

One participant noted, "having engaged with people that don't have skin in the game. I don't see the same engagement and the same drive" (TS, PhD student, BAME, interview). Having skin in the game (or being a person of colour) is evidently a motivating factor for engaging in DTC and anti-racist endeavours. Whilst the burden of this should not solely be on people of colour, often, they are the drivers of this change within HE. From the student activists to the academics of colour, having 'skin in the game' is a seemingly necessary attribute to the progression of decoloniality in the university.

6. Conclusion

“I think if there was one message to pass on, it would be that the goal isn't to be the best in the country. The goal is to be the best that we can be individually, and if the best that we can be is a high standard to meet, then we better be meeting that standard!” (FSA, 2nd year student, white, interview).

This research concludes with a message from one of the student participants. This quote represents the ability of the student population to provoke and interrogate the university's systems. Ultimately students' experiences and desires are central to the success of a university and centring their voices in the DTC debate is necessary to exact change.

Keele as an institution is complex and a challenge to exact change within. This research demonstrates that students do not see change taking place at the university; their inability to see stems from their transient nature. They pass through modules and years without oversight or the ability to look back and see a difference. Change at Keele requires small, revisionist attempts to decolonise.

There are many barriers to DTC at Keele; a contested understanding of what change should look like and how to achieve it continues to impede efforts to decolonise. However, there is a consensus that tokenistic attempts to decolonise are not good enough. Keele must demonstrate a genuine commitment to DTC and the decolonisation of knowledge production. This should be through the development of greater diversity and representation in the university's research, curricula, and canon.

Students need space with the systems at Keele to voice their experiences and views, and to ultimately hold staff and the university accountable. Students need to be empowered to collaborate with staff, producing DTC change together. Their role and relationship must be redefined for the university-led attempt to decolonise.

The complexities between DTC and race must be acknowledged. Whilst they are not inherently the same, the overlap in experiences and motivation is evident at Keele. Student experiences of racism and marginalisation within the classroom and their learning are DTC issues.

In an attempt to centre a plurality of voices in the decolonising debate, this research concludes with participant recommendations, participant visions for the future, and the researchers' reflections on concluding this research and the role of DTC in future.

6.1. Recommendations

Student participants proffered a series of recommendations that, in their mind, would be a welcome change to DTC at Keele. An exhaustive list of these has been shared with the academic DTC lead in the hope that some recommendations can be implemented.

In summary, students called for greater transparency regarding DTC change at Keele. They would like to see the progress and the journey to decolonise made apparent. One suggested that best practices within the university could be shared with the staff-student groups. This would be a truly reflexive and self-critical move; it acknowledges where the institution is doing well and places where it could do better.

They called for greater formalisation of DTC. This is in two parts: firstly, formalising the DTC learning through the start of year inductions; and secondly, in mandating diverse reading and examples throughout modules.

There should be recognition for staff and students who produce decolonial research or projects within the university. Decolonial pedagogical methods, therefore, must be taught to postgraduate students and new staff at the university. They need to be supported in developing decolonised modules, proposals, and assignments.

6.2. Futures

This research ends with a look toward the future of DTC at Keele university. What that future will look like with the ever-growing concern cost of living crisis, Brexit, and increasing social unrest is uncertain. DTC's importance is enduring; the need to dismantle coloniality in how knowledge is produced and legitimised has widespread benefits beyond the university.

Participants shared their thoughts on what a decolonised Keele would look like. Some were optimistic in their belief that the DTC agenda would be widely incorporated across the university. For others, this future is bleaker unless there is a more comprehensive institutional action towards decolonisation.

There is no one vision for the future of DTC. Fanon (2007) writes that decolonisation looks different for all because we start from different places, perspectives, and struggles. The collective hopes for future decolonisation in the university are indicative of this challenge.

For the future of Keele, one participant shared, "To be honest with you, if there was decolonised Keele, I don't think my role would even be needed [...] 'cause we've achieved it." (SH, Senior management, BAME, interview). This quote summarises the ambiguity of looking toward the future. The future that will be unveiled cannot be known in the present, yet our

role in making that future is within our control. This participant's role with EDI and DTC would no longer be necessary for a decolonised Keele.

6.3. Reflections

As I conclude this research, society outside the university seems more complex than ever. My thoughts are flooded with the death of an unarmed Black 24-year-old man at the hands of the police and the death of the Queen. With this, the decolonising agenda is seemingly unimportant, yet I consider the transformative ability of society and culture, and how they can grow through knowledge. The university's ability to produce, legitimise, and disseminate knowledge is, in fact, more important than ever.

In the wake of such contestation and complexities in society, the institution's role must adapt to reflect those who feel excluded by every institution. From police brutality, othering in the classroom, and uneven prosecution rates, decolonising these institutions should be more of an imperative than ever before. Perhaps DTC needs a catalyst to reinvigorate calls to decolonise. I hope that the death of the figurehead of Empire and a young man whose future was taken from him is enough for widespread decolonisation, thus creating safe spaces for the diverse cultures of the UK to rebuild and redefine.

In doing this research, I have learnt how complex decolonising the university is in practice. There is no one way, no right way, to achieve its goals. However, despite this, progress is being made at Keele. I can only hope that this research exposes areas of weakness and strength that can be ameliorated in the future, so that future generations of students can feel safe, represented, and included in the lecture halls of Keele.

Drawing on Phipps and McDonnel (2021) work, I reflect on what tools the institution is giving students. Are these adequate to decolonise the space with the institution leading the way? This approach's language and tools must be different from those equipped by grassroots endeavours. In the context of Keele university, I believe that they are asking students the wrong questions. There is a need to reimagine what collaboration and co-production looks like between staff, students, and institutions. Students are not responsible for legitimising knowledge and designing curricula. Their role in university-led approaches to decolonise is at present, uncertain.

7. References

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1. Reflexive Diary Information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET (For reflexive diary)

Study Title: Decolonising Keele: an exploration of the perceptions and barriers to the implementation of Decolonising the Curriculum

Aims of the Research: To understand the students' perspectives of current Decolonising the Curriculum initiatives at Keele University. This includes their own experiences of Decolonising the Curriculum issues and implementation within their school or faculty at Keele.

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study Decolonising Keele: an exploration of the perceptions and barriers to the implementation of Decolonising the Curriculum. This project is being undertaken by Sophie Thompson-Hyland and supervised by Dr Lisa Lau.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Do feel free to ask the researcher(s) if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information. Please take time to consider whether or not you wish to participate.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited because you are part of the Decolonising the Curriculum (DTC) working group or the Student Star Voice Committee (SSVC) within your school and are currently an undergraduate or postgraduate student at Keele University, or are otherwise involved in DTC work in Keele

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If after reading the information sheet and asking any further questions you may have, you do not feel comfortable participating, you do not have to.

If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a digital consent form, which you will have a copy of for your own records. You are free to withdraw your participation and/or your data from this study without giving reasons. After the research activity has taken place, if you decide to withdraw your data, you can do so by 1st September 2022 by contacting the researcher using the contact details on this information sheet. Upon being withdrawn, all your data will be destroyed.

Your data will be anonymised by default, however you are also free to request your details to not be anonymised at any point. Some participants may wish to retain ownership of their narratives and leave their details in the project. It should be noted that anonymity may not always be possible with this study as the participant pool is very specific (DTC working group or SSVC). You can change your mind about this at any point during your interview/focus group and after until 1st September 2022, where your data can be re-anonymised.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be sent a reflexive diary to complete via e-mail, which will contain 5 open questions that will require you to reflect on your experience of Decolonising the Curriculum issues and experiences within your school. You will be requested to complete this diary within 1 week. Upon completion, you will then return this diary, via e-mail, to the researcher: Sophie Thompson-Hyland (w4h62@students.keele.ac.uk).

You will then be asked to take part in an interview on Teams Chat lasting for about 30 minutes (a separate information sheet will be provided with details)

What are the benefits of taking part?

There are no financial benefits, but by taking part, you will be providing valuable information that will contribute towards Decolonising the Curriculum at Keele University. You will have a chance to share your thoughts and experiences which will be used in future decolonising work and be part of Keele University's decolonising legacy.

What are the risks of taking part?

There are no expected risks to your participation. However, if any problem arises during the research activity, please let the researcher know. Discussing Decolonising the Curriculum may be challenging but you are free to stop or take a break at any time

How will information about me be used?

Your data will be used in a dissertation, which is part of my post graduate degree program requirements, and possible publication. Your diary entries will be shared with Keele staff (including, but not limited to, the Race Equality Charter Self Assessment Team (REC SAT) and faculty-led DTC workshops) and also possibly beyond Keele, to others working on DTC work nationally and internationally. Your data will be anonymised or not at your stated preference. Your personal data set will be destroyed upon my graduation but your transcribed data will be kept as part of Keele's DTC repository for 10 years. Your data collected, with your granted permission, may be retained for informing future Decolonising the Curriculum initiatives at Keele University.

Who will have access to information about me?

Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data collected from participants. Your data will be stored securely on a password protected computer that only the key researcher has access to.

Your personal details (unless you request otherwise) will not be used in the analysis or write up. A pseudonym will be allocated to each participant and there will no identifying information embedded in quotes used in the write up

I do however have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law

Who is funding and organising the research?

This research is self-funded.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher- Sophie Thompson-Hyland (w4h62@students.keele.ac.uk) who will do their best to answer your questions. Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher you may contact Dr Lisa Lau (l.lau@keele.ac.uk)

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Research Integrity Team Directorate of Research, Innovation and Engagement IC2 Building, Keele University ST5 5NE. E-mail: research.governance@keele.ac.uk

Appendix 2. Interview Information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET (For Interviews)

Study Title: Decolonising Keele: an exploration of the perceptions and barriers to the implementation of Decolonising the Curriculum

Aims of the Research: To understand the students' perspectives of current Decolonising the Curriculum initiatives at Keele University. This includes their own experiences of Decolonising the Curriculum issues and implementation within their school or faculty at Keele.

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study Decolonising Keele: an exploration of the perceptions and barriers to the implementation of Decolonising the Curriculum. This project is being undertaken by Sophie Thompson-Hyland and supervised by Dr Lisa Lau.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Do feel free to ask the researcher(s) if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information. Please take time to consider whether or not you wish to participate.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited because you are part of the Decolonising the Curriculum (DTC) working group or the Student Star Voice Committee (SSVC) within your school and are currently an undergraduate or postgraduate student at Keele University, or are otherwise involved in DTC work in Keele

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If after reading the information sheet and asking any further questions you may have, you do not feel comfortable participating, you do not have to.

If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a digital consent form, which you will have a copy of for your own records. You are free to withdraw your participation and/or your data from this study without giving reasons. After the research activity has taken place, if you decide to withdraw your data, you can do so by 1st September 2022 by contacting the researcher using the contact details on this information sheet. Upon being withdrawn, all your data will be destroyed.

Your data will be anonymised by default, however you are also free to request your details to not be anonymised at any point. Some participants may wish to retain ownership of their narratives and leave their details in the project. It should be noted that anonymity may not always be possible with this study as the participant pool is very specific (DTC working group or SSVC). You can change your mind about this at any point during your interview/focus group and after until 1st September 2022, where your data can be re-anonymised.

What will happen if I take part?

You will participate in an interview which will take 30 minutes. It will be conducted using the video call function within chats on Teams. This interview will expand further on the reflexive diary and will focus on your experience of Decolonising the Curriculum issues and experiences within your school.

What are the benefits of taking part?

There are no financial benefits, but by taking part, you will be providing valuable information that will contribute towards Decolonising the Curriculum at Keele University. You will have a chance to share your thoughts and experiences which will be used in future decolonising work and be part of Keele University's decolonising legacy.

What are the risks of taking part?

There are no expected risks to your participation. However, if any problem arises during the research activity, please let the researcher know. Discussing Decolonising the Curriculum may be challenging but you are free to stop or take a break at any time. (small world study – don't use small world)

How will information about me be used?

Your data will be used in a dissertation, which is part of my post graduate degree program requirements, and possible publication. Your data will be shared with Keele staff (including, but not limited to, the Race Equality Charter Self Assessment Team (REC SAT) and faculty-led DTC

workshops) and also possibly beyond Keele, to others working on DTC work nationally and internationally. Your data will be anonymised or not at your stated preference. Your raw data set will be destroyed upon my graduation but your transcribed data will be kept as part of Keele's DTC repository for 10 years. Your data collected, with your granted permission, may be retained for informing future Decolonising the Curriculum initiatives at Keele University.

Who will have access to information about me?

Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data collected from participants. Your data will be stored securely on a password protected computer that only the key researcher has access to.

Your personal details (unless you request otherwise) will not be used in the analysis or write up. A pseudonym will be allocated to each participant and there will no identifying information embedded in quotes used in the write up

I do however have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law

Who is funding and organising the research?

This research is self-funded.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher- Sophie Thompson-Hyland (w4h62@students.keele.ac.uk) who will do their best to answer your questions. Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher you may contact Dr Lisa Lau (l.lau@keele.ac.uk)

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

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Keele University ST5 5NE. E-mail: research.governance@keele.ac.uk

Appendix 3. Focus Group Information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET (Focus Groups)

Study Title: Decolonising Keele: an exploration of the perceptions and barriers to the implementation of Decolonising the Curriculum

Aims of the Research: To understand the students' perspectives of current Decolonising the Curriculum initiatives at Keele University. This includes their own experiences of Decolonising the Curriculum issues and implementation within their school or faculty at Keele.

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study *Decolonising Keele: an exploration of the perceptions and barriers to the implementation of Decolonising the Curriculum*. This project is being undertaken by Sophie Thompson-Hyland and supervised by Dr Lisa Lau.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Do feel free to ask the researcher(s) if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information. Please take time to consider whether or not you wish to participate.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited because you are part of the Decolonising the Curriculum (DTC) working group or the Student Star Voice Committee (SSVC) within your school and are currently an undergraduate or postgraduate student at Keele University, or are otherwise involved in DTC work in Keele

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If after reading the information sheet and asking any further questions you may have, you do not feel comfortable participating, you do not have to.

If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a digital consent form, which you will have a copy of for your own records. You are free to withdraw your participation and/or your data from this study without giving reasons. After the research activity has taken place, if you decide to withdraw your data, you can do so by 1st September 2022 by contacting the researcher using the contact details on this information sheet. Upon withdrawal, all of your data will be destroyed to the extent that is possible. It should be noted that complete removal of your focus group data may not be possible, due to the impact this may have on the remainder of the focus group data. Your personal data, however, can and will be completely destroyed.

Your data will be anonymised by default, however you are also free to request your details to not be anonymised at any point. Some participants may wish to retain ownership of their narratives and leave their details in the project. It should be noted that anonymity may not always be possible with this study as the participant pool is very specific (DTC working group or SSVC). You can change your mind about this at any point during your interview/focus group and after until 1st September 2022, where your data can be re-anonymised.

What will happen if I take part?

You will participate in a focus group with 6-8 students which will take 1hr 30. It will be conducted using the video call function within chats on Teams. This focus group will centre on the Race Equality Charter Self Assessment Team (REC SAT) and Faculty feedback response.

What are the benefits of taking part?

There are no financial benefits, but by taking part, you will be providing valuable information that will contribute towards Decolonising the Curriculum at Keele University. You will have a chance to share your thoughts and experiences which will be used in future decolonising work and be part of Keele University's decolonising legacy.

What are the risks of taking part?

There are no expected risks to your participation. However, if any problem arises during the research activity, please let the researcher know. Discussing Decolonising the Curriculum may be challenging

but you are free to stop or take a break at any time. (small world – don't call it small world in info sheet)

How will information about me be used?

Your data will be used in a dissertation, which is part of my post graduate degree program requirements, and possible publication. Your data will be shared with Keele staff staff (including, but not limited to, the Race Equality Charter Self Assessment Team (REC SAT) and faculty-led DTC workshops) and possibly beyond Keele, to others working on DTC work nationally and internationally. Your data will be anonymised or not at your stated preference. Your personal data set will be destroyed upon my graduation but your transcribed data will be kept as part of Keele's DTC repository for 10 years. Your data collected, with your granted permission, may be retained for informing future Decolonising the Curriculum initiatives at Keele University.

Who will have access to information about me?

Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data collected from participants. Your data will be stored securely on a password protected computer that only the key researcher has access to.

Your personal details (unless you request otherwise) will not be used in the analysis or write up. A pseudonym will be allocated to each participant and there will no identifying information embedded in quotes used in the write up

I do however have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law

Who is funding and organising the research?

This research is self-funded.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher- Sophie Thompson-Hyland (w4h62@students.keele.ac.uk) who will do their best to answer your questions. Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher you may contact Dr Lisa Lau (l.lau@keele.ac.uk)

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

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Appendix 4. Reflexive Diary Consent form

CONSENT FORM (Reflexive diary)

Title of Project: Decolonising Keele: an exploration of the perceptions and barriers to the implementation of Decolonising the Curriculum

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: *Sophie Thompson-Hyland, w4h62 @students.keele.ac.uk, 07513723456*

Please tick box if you agree with the statement

1	I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions	
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that: i) I am free to cease participation at any time	
	ii) I am free to withdraw my data at any time up to 1 st Sept 2022	
3	I agree to take part in this study	
4	I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised (unless I request otherwise) before it is submitted for assessment and publication.	
5	I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects	
6	I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research projects	
7	I agree to be quoted verbatim	
8	I confirm that I am 18 or above in age.	

Name of participant	Date	Signature (digital or email response)
Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 5. Interview Consent form

CONSENT FORM (Interview)

Title of Project: Decolonising Keele: an exploration of the perceptions and barriers to the implementation of Decolonising the Curriculum

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: *Sophie Thompson-Hyland, w4h62 @students.keele.ac.uk, 07513723456*

Please tick box if you agree with the statement

1	I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions	
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that: i) I am free to cease participation at any time ii) I am free to withdraw my data at any time up to 1 st Sept 2022	
3	I agree to take part in this study	
4	I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised (unless I request otherwise) before it is submitted for assessment and publication.	
5	I agree to the interview being video recorded	
6	I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects	
7	I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research projects	
8	I agree to be quoted verbatim	
9	I confirm that I am 18 or above in age.	

Name of participant	Date	Signature (digital or email response)
Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 6. Focus Group Consent form

CONSENT FORM (Focus Group)

Title of Project: Decolonising Keele: an exploration of the perceptions and barriers to the implementation of Decolonising the Curriculum

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: *Sophie Thompson-Hyland, w4h62 @students.keele.ac.uk, 07513723456*

Please tick box if you agree with the statement

1	I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions	
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that: i) I am free to cease participation at any time	
	ii) I am free to withdraw my data at any time up to 1 st Sept 2022	
3	I agree to take part in this study	
4	I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised (unless I request otherwise) before it is submitted for publication.	
5	I agree to the focus group being video recorded	
6	I agree to keep the issues discussed within the focus group confidential, particularly to avoid identifying any of the participants in relation to these issues/individual comments made during the session	
	However, I understand that what I share in the focus group may be shared with others outside the focus group by other members of the focus group. This may lead to the identification of my anonymous contributions by others. I have considered this and agree to take part.	
7	I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects	
8	I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research projects	
9	I agree to be quoted verbatim	
10	I confirm that I am 18 or above in age.	

Name of participant	Date	Signature (digital or email response)
Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 7. Reflexive diary template

Decolonising Keele: an exploration of the perceptions and barriers to the implementation of
Decolonising the Curriculum

Reflexive diary

- This diary is to encourage you to think reflexively about your experiences of DTC issues in your school (or in the wider university), doing DTC work (through the DTC working groups, SSVS or any other format) and to think about what a decolonised Keele looks like to you.
- It is important for this diary to reflect on how the experiences, work and future at Keele made you feel. Please use examples and give as much detail as you feel comfortable with sharing.
- There are a few prompts to guide your reflection, but you are able to change the heading if you wish. This is your reflection on DTC at Keele and it can be completed in a way that feels most useful to you.

DTC issues

DTC work

DTC future at Keele

Anything else

Appendix 8. Student Interview schedule

Student interview schedule

What is your motivation for participating in DTC?

- Why do you think its important?
- What motivates your learning/growth?

Have you seen changes in your school or the wider university?

- If not why?
- Is DTC possible at Keele?
- Why ?
- Examples

Do you feel like you (or students) are co-producing DTC changes in your school?

- How much input do you get in this process?
- How much is that listened to?

Appendix 9. Expert Interview schedule

Interview- expert

When did you start DTC work?

- And why?

Why do you have to do this work?

Can you tell me about your role within DTC at Keele?

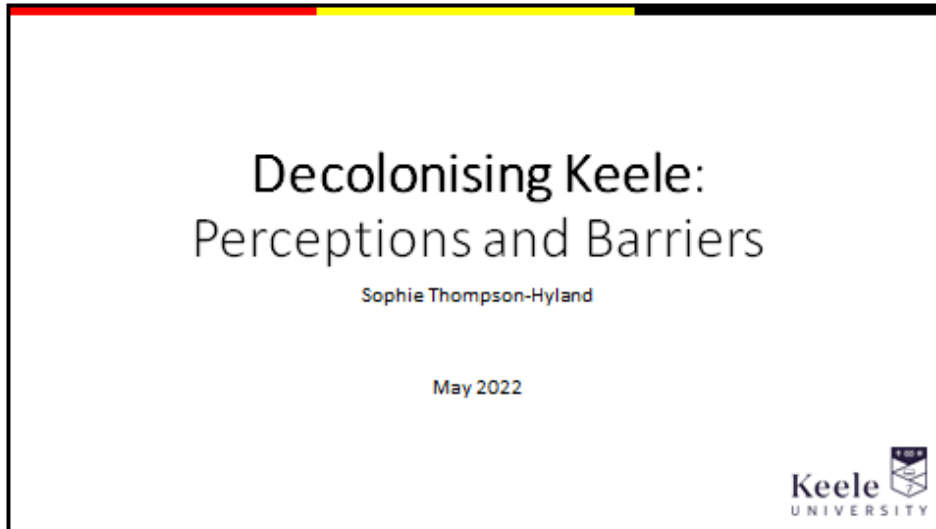
Do you feel like you can make change at Keele?

- Barriers?
- Is it meaningful change?

What does a decolonised Keele look like to you?

How do you think students feel about DTC?

Appendix 10. Presentation for DTC faculty workshop [May 2022]



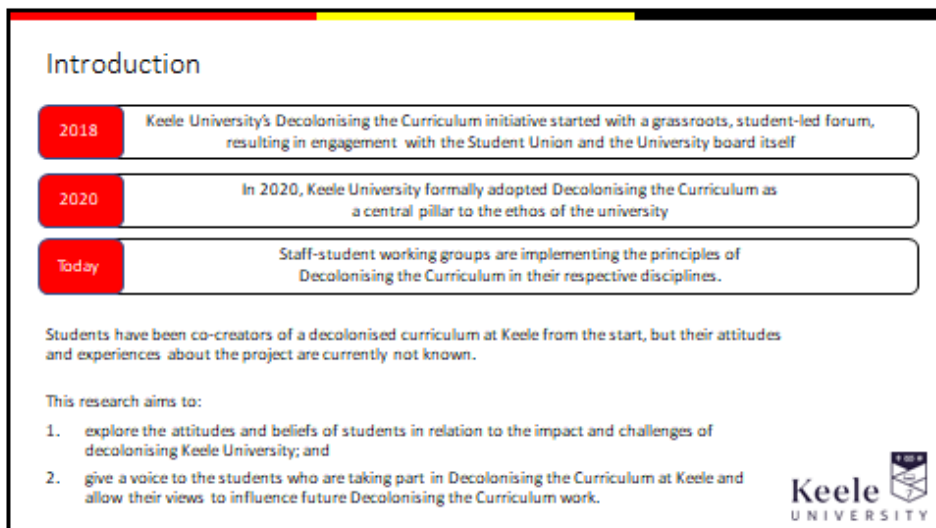
Decolonising Keele: Perceptions and Barriers

Sophie Thompson-Hyland

May 2022

Keele
UNIVERSITY

1



Introduction

2018	Keele University's Decolonising the Curriculum initiative started with a grassroots, student-led forum, resulting in engagement with the Student Union and the University board itself
2020	In 2020, Keele University formally adopted Decolonising the Curriculum as a central pillar to the ethos of the university
Today	Staff-student working groups are implementing the principles of Decolonising the Curriculum in their respective disciplines.

Students have been co-creators of a decolonised curriculum at Keele from the start, but their attitudes and experiences about the project are currently not known.

This research aims to:

1. explore the attitudes and beliefs of students in relation to the impact and challenges of decolonising Keele University; and
2. give a voice to the students who are taking part in Decolonising the Curriculum at Keele and allow their views to influence future Decolonising the Curriculum work.

Keele
UNIVERSITY

2

Method



9 Participants (4 expert, 5 non-expert)



Recruitment through Heads of Schools and gatekeepers



Participant reflexive diaries, Remote interviews completed, focus group planned



Decolonising methods

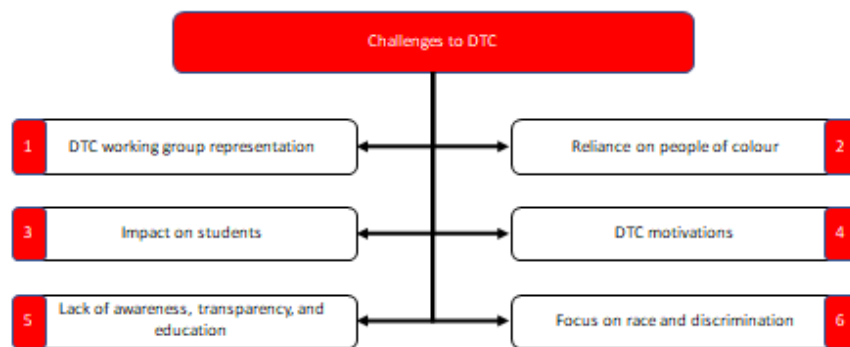


Full report to be published as Masters dissertation



3

Emerging themes*



*Analysis ongoing, therefore final themes yet to be determined



4

DTC working group representation

The majority of it was middle-aged, quite obviously middle class, white academics

Having engaged with people that don't have skin in the game, I don't see the same engagement and the same drive

It was very much working in a silo with my school



5

Reliance on people of colour

I feel like decolonizing at Keele really rests on [people of colour's] shoulders and my fear is always these staff members are the ones we turn to constantly and we're overworking them

It's no secret with five white officers, we can't speak for these student because we don't experience what they experience on a day to day basis

I don't think I have to do this work, which is why I've withdrawn a lot because I'm exhausted and burnt out from pandemic and from the work in general. And like I said, the disappointment of where we are at the moment

Other Members [from DKN] that have done this work still carry that trauma 2-3 years later.

I think what's really, really important is that the Decolonise Keele network was born out of strike [...] I think that context needs to still be a key part of this, because when staff had time, when they had withdrawn their formal labour from these institutions, they had time to work with students in there like flat hierarchy



6

Impact on students

“ I'd argue you only have one prime year of having student activists [because] it's almost a detriment to their academic studies ”

“ I don't think there was ever a dialogue created between those students and the academics ”

“ You just feel like you're being either too difficult or you're just overthinking something ... you just put the blame on yourself ”

“ Decolonisation... it seems sort of being tacked on at the end ”



7

DTC motivations



For me, because it came from the top, once it was imposed, it was never going to be progress

We proudly say we have a bronze award which, you know isn't a bronze award, it's an admission of racism within the system. It is not that you've actually fixed it

The thing that I've learned most about decolonizing work is that a lot of people don't agree with each other, even when you're all in that space



8

Lack of awareness, transparency, and education

Even if things have changed, I haven't really noticed anything
I don't see much from what's happening within the working groups
A large part of the student population don't understand what decolonizing is, or misunderstand it
We don't have the language to talk about some of this stuff

The staff were all meant to have training around like implicit biases and things like that... but I don't think that ever actually happened
It's not easy because a lot of lecturers, they'll listen to what's being said, but we can never really see any changes
Decolonising is not a matter of just replacing a percentage of authors on a reading list

Focus on race and discrimination

“ In the middle of a lecture, it's obviously time to pray, but they're not just gonna get up because they don't feel comfortable ”

“ When I came to England here like in 2019, I thought racism was over... but I then I came here and my re-education was so fast I have whiplash ”

“ I've got some microaggressions happening, but for them it's more like no, there's issues that I've raised and nothing's happened. So they're more being discriminated against ”

Note: Racism and discrimination typically falls under EDI at Keele, but have been included here due to overlaps with DYC and the high occurrence of discussion across participants

Sample overarching opinions



I wasn't really prepared for how profoundly disappointed and angry I am at where Keele is

I think we could be a lot more ambitious and it's frustrating because we have the ability to be ambitious

I don't know if Western academia has the infrastructure to handle all the inputs that need to come in right now

If we're going to have decolonisation, we have to address it and bring everyone to an equal platform

11

Recommendations



Create more integrated approach to facilitate messaging to students beyond their modules (e.g. working alongside SU and societies to embed tenets of DTC in multiple avenues of university life)



Integrate working groups so they communicate with each other, at least within faculties. There is currently nowhere to share best practice, experience, lessons learned etc. across faculties, particularly for students



Empower students by providing those who are interested with training in a similar manner to which the staff are provided training, so they can disseminate and advocate throughout cohorts. This could become part of being in DTC working group: to attend training



There needs to be visibility, different ways of sharing information to show what's been done, what's being done, and what's to be done (i.e. a roadmap) to see where Keele has come from and where it is going



Consider tying the DTC roadmap to business outcomes. Future students will come to expect decolonised curriculums, and early adoption could provide a competitive differentiator to increase student intake

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Appendix 11. Focus Group Interview schedule

Welcome

Introductions- subject, area of interest, experience with DTC, motivations for taking part in the research.

Update about the research

Presentations- show slides, quick talk through

- Thoughts/responses
- Did the faculties/staff respond in the way you expected?
- How do you feel about events like this taking place?

Keele DTC progress

Discussion points

- Talk through- initial thoughts feelings?
- Do you think these will work?
- Do you see any of these in action at Keele? What's missing?
- How would you like to be involved in DTC going forwards?
- How can the university's progress be better shared with you?
- How can the university get past the student barriers?
- What does a decolonised Keele look like to you?

Appendix 12. Student Project Ethics Committee (SPEC) certificate



School of Geography, Geology and the Environment (GGE)

Student Project Ethics Committee (SPEC)

Certificate of Ethical Approval

This is to certify that the GGE SPEC has approved the application for the project entitled:

Decolonising Keele: an exploration of the perceptions and barriers to the implementation of Decolonising the Curriculum

Ethical approval has been granted for:

- 30 Online reflexive diaries to be completed prior to interviews
- 30 interviews with students
- 2 interviews with DTC experts
- 4 focus groups with students previously interviewed

Approved by:

Dr Mark Lucherini, member of the GGE SPEC Committee.

Date:

24/02/2022

Certified:

This SPEC form has been granted ethical approval by the GGE Ethics Committee, as above. JR.