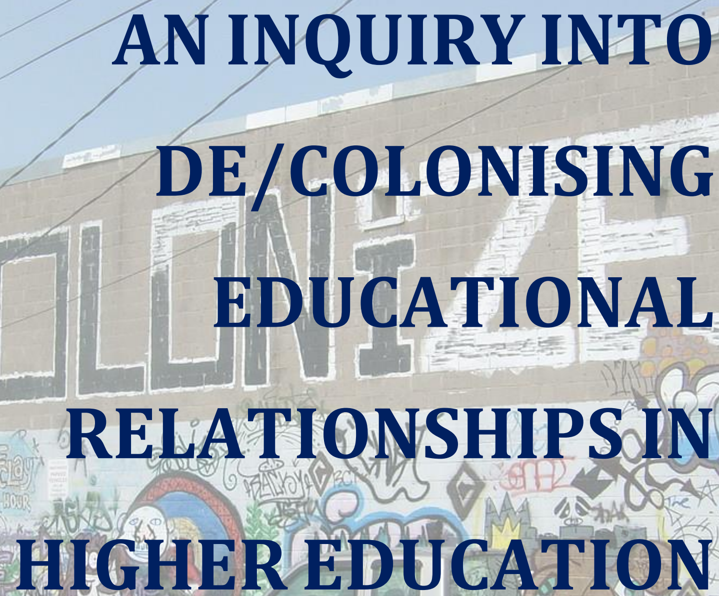

AN INQUIRY INTO DE/COLONISING EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Inquiry Report

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The recorded vidoes of the Seminar Series that were conducted at the University of Exeter have been made available at the University of Regina, Faculty of Education's Centre for Educational Research, Collaboration, & Development (CERCD) YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjMxdkbpnVyV7OzLK45cpYg

**To cite these YouTube videos in your work please follow this format (APA 7th Edition):*
Uploader, A. A. (Year, Month Day). *Title of video* [Video]. YouTube. URL

Example:

Pirbhai-Illich, F. & Martin, F. (CERCD, 2022, April 21). *Seminar 1: Introduction to coloniality and decoloniality Regina* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLxNpyWpDk0

Pirbhai-Illich, F. & Martin, F. (CERCD, 2022, April 21). *Seminar 2: Exploring whiteness, decentering whiteness and teacher ontologies Exeter* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFgBnGn5OZs

Pirbhai-Illich, F. & Martin, F. (CERCD, 2022, April 22). *Seminar 3: Race and racism in education Exeter* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cItk8Ny7G_U

An Inquiry[1] into De/colonising Educational Relationships in Higher Education.

Introduction

For some time, scholars in settler colonial nations have been arguing for the need to decolonise education, for example, Mignolo in Argentina (2011), Battiste in Canada (2013), Smith in New Zealand (2012), Moreton-Robinson in Australia (2015) and Mbebe in South Africa (2016). Calls to systematically decolonise higher education in the United Kingdom (UK) and other European countries only began following the 2015 #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movement led by student activists in South Africa (Kumalo, 2021). For example, the #RhodesMustFall movement sparked a similar grassroots student movement in the UK at University College London (Peters, 2015) that spread to the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and the University of Cambridge. However, these calls have only had serious traction following the murder of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis in May 2020. The subsequent global response, including the #BlackLivesMatter protests in the UK, led to a flurry of activity in the name of decolonisation across the education sector (Okolosie, 2020). Whilst the desire to act is understandable, to do so without having previously engaged with the extensive scholarship on decolonisation risks such actions becoming reductionist and performative and repeating the very harms that they are intended to address (Keval, 2019; Moosavi, 2020). Added to this is the complication of how decolonisation is interpreted and practised in different contexts (Andreotti et. al., 2015).

For example, in the UK there is a long tradition of scholarship on racial equity (Hall, 1980; Gillborn, 2008) and anti-racist education (Gillborn, 1995; Anthias & Lloyd, 2002) that, more recently, has become subsumed within university Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) agendas. As Dhillon (2021) points out, "Critical race theory, anti-colonialism, anti-racism, diversity and inclusion, reducing attainment gaps between students of different ethnic backgrounds: all have become seemingly interchangeable under the umbrella term "decolonization" (p. 251). This leads to a business-as-usual focus on responding to overt discrimination, and/or increasing representation of minoritized communities within institutions (Ahmed, 2012). Responses are also often fragmented with initiatives being conducted in silos[2] leading to one group being pitted against another in the competition for resources (Bhopal & Henderson, 2021) resulting in a hierarchisation of 'need' rather than addressing the more fundamental issue of the coloniality of education and what that means for educational praxis (Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017b). If we accept that coloniality, as described by Quijano

[1] For racialised peoples across the globe, western research is a dirty word due to its inextricable entanglement with European imperialism and colonialism (Smith, 2012). For this reason, we use the term 'research' when referring to scholarship in the academy that is commonly understood as research. However, when we refer to ***this*** project, we have chosen to use the term 'inquiry' as we discuss in Section 3, Methodology and Methods of Inquiry.

[2] For example, Higher Education equity initiatives are compartmentalised by gender (Athena Swan), race (Race Equity Charter), LGBTQ+ (Stonewall acceptance without exception), and (dis)ability (Disability charter)

(2007), is the living legacy of colonialism - a system of social discrimination that is integrated into contemporary social and political structures - then any project in decolonisation needs to make the coloniality of such systems and structures explicit before any action can be taken. Meghji & Niang (2021) address the issue of conflating decolonisation with anti-racism by making a helpful distinction between Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Decolonial thought.

> Conceptually, CRT and decolonial thought disagree over the centrality of colonialism and empire to present day inequalities. Decolonial thought uses the notion of 'coloniality' to stress the continuity of colonial relations. 'Coloniality' refers to how the epistemic and material power relations set in motion during the age of European colonialism still shape the present world (Grosfoguel, 2007). Contrastingly, CRT seeks to study contemporary racism outside of its colonial foundations, moving beyond "the sins [of the] past (e.g., slavery, colonization, and genocide;" Bonilla-Silva, 2015, p. 74). CRT thus stresses that racism only exists because it serves a contemporary function with contemporary beneficiaries. In order to comprehend this system, we need to analyse its reproduction through specific racial ideologies, practices and contestations that exist beyond colonial legacies (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). This conceptual difference implies a methodological divergence; through studying the "contemporary foundation" of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2015, p. 74), CRT methodologically commits to a presentism. Contrastingly, decolonial thought adopts a much more historical approach, seeking to connect the past realities of colonialism, enslavement, and empires with the present day (Meghji & Niang, 2021, p. 132).

The inquiry project reported here is one in which we sought to address these issues by providing a seminar series on 'De/colonising Educational Relationships' in the academic year 2020-2021 for staff and doctoral students at the University of Exeter, situated in the south-west of England. We led a series of nine seminars, one a month, from October 2020 - July 2021, drawing on the findings of longitudinal research[3] conducted in Canada between 2007 - 2019 (Pirbhai-Illich, 2013; Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2020). Our work is primarily intended for those who are racialized as white. Our intention is to unpack how the education profession in what some refer to as the Global North, has been influenced by coloniality – a profession that is predominantly made up of teachers of white, Euro-western heritage. All educators, whatever their racialized position, will have been influenced by coloniality, but the work to be done to understand how one embodies colonial forms of education, and to begin de/colonising those habits of being, will be different for those racialized as black and brown.

1. Contexts for the Inquiry Project

> To desire or aspire to colonize another person/community requires an extremely warped mindset, a high level of intellectual arrogance and a dehumanized personhood. One has to equate the purpose of life to material acquisitions, affirm their personhood only through their ability to dominate/bully others, shrink their mental capacity so as not to respect/understand

[3] In our earlier work we used the term 'research'. As a result of our ongoing engagement in de/colonising work, we have become increasingly uncomfortable with this term - hence our choice of 'inquiry' as an alternative (see also Mignolo, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZfXSs8FioE).

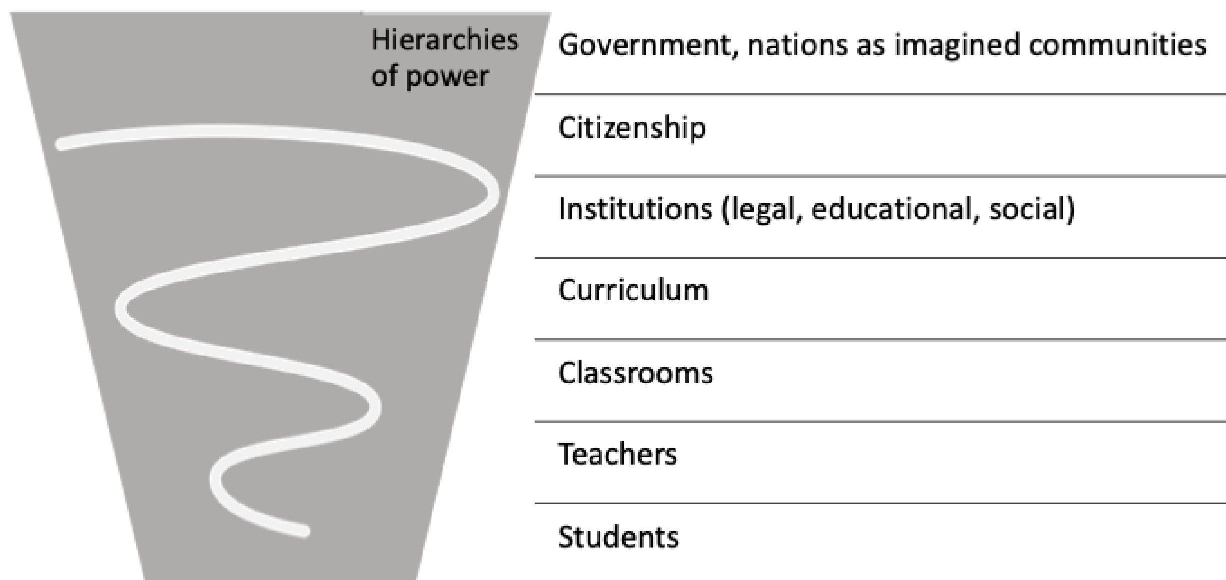
human diversity and rationalize a wide range of unfettered violence. (Dei & Imoka, 2018, p. 1)

There has been a proliferation of articles, seminars, courses, activism, and strategic plans in higher education that incorporate the term 'decolonisation.' This has been accompanied by a proliferation of interpretations of the term and what it might mean in terms of practical action. In some respects, this is to be expected because one of the key features of decolonising processes is that they will take different shapes and forms depending on the context - the process has to be directly connected to, situated in, and respondent to the specific ways in which colonisation has played out at a local scale. However, there is also the risk that the proliferation of activity is more about performativity (the desire to be seen to be doing something) than about genuine personal and institutional change.

In this section we therefore outline the various contexts within which the seminar series on 'De/colonising educational relationships' took place. In doing so we use a structure that reflects our understanding of how ongoing colonial hierarchies of power influence educational relationships from the macro, through the meso, and to the micro levels (Figure 1). The diagram shows how education is part of a system of being, doing and knowing that starts at the macro level of government and the nation as an imagined community[4] (Anderson, 1991), the influence of which is funnelled down through the meso level of institutions and national curricula and, to the micro level of classrooms, teachers, and students. It is a system we are all implicated in.

Figure 1

Hierarchies of Power and Their Influence on Educational Relations



[4] See, for example, Meghji & Niang's (2021) assertion that, 'While Britain was (and is) a key player in the (re)production of western universalism, it simultaneously purports an even more myopic 'little Englander' universalization. While the 'little Englander' label has typically been construed as a foreign policy position, we suggest seeing it as an epistemic position. The little Englander spirit produces specific knowledge about Britain and Britain's history, whereby Britain is represented as a miniscule island that managed to create a global empire through its unrivalled work ethic, philanthropy, and esteemed civilizational values' (p. 139).

These hierarchies of power are central to what Grosfoguel (2011) refers to as the Colonial World System, and what Mignolo (2007) refers to as coloniality. Before we go any further, we therefore set out our understandings of colonialism, coloniality, de/coloniality and de/colonisation.

1. 1 Coloniality/Modernity/Decoloniality

Colonialism is the ideology of superiority that led to the Western imperial/colonial expansion from Europe across the world with the intention of acquiring full or partial political control over other countries, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically. Colonialism is thus a mechanism for the accumulation of capital from the periphery (Africa, the Americas, Asia) to the centre (Europe). "The systems of capitalism, colonisation, racism, and heteropatriarchy aren't separate systems that collude or collide in the present moment; they are mutually interlocking and reciprocally constructive. Capital *is* a coloniser, just as it is racist and heteropatriarchal" (Vergès, 2021, p. 12). Colonisation is the active practice of domination, in which the colonising nation violently conquers another nation, subjugating the colonised population who are forced to erase their own ways of being, doing and valuing and to adopt the language and cultural values of the colonisers.

Coloniality is the underlying logic of all Euro-Western modern/colonial imperialisms (Quijano, 2007) that is the ongoing legacy of colonialism that underpins modernity[5]. It is a knowledge system based on a series of 'logics' - logics of separation and superiority (Machado de Oliveira, 2021), and logics of elimination and extraction (Grande, 2018) - that are used to classify phenomena on the basis of 'objective' characteristics, putting them into categories that are arranged in a hierarchical structure, creating hierarchies of worth / value. Coloniality/modernity is considered, from within its own logic, to be superior to any other knowledge systems and, as such, to be a universal 'good.' Coloniality is perpetuated through institutions of power (e.g., banking systems, legal systems, education) which privilege Euro-Western ways of being, doing and knowing on a global scale (Grosfoguel, 2011). Grosfoguel (2011) identifies 15 'entangled, global hierarchies' including:

- an international division of labour of core and periphery where capital organised labour in the periphery around coerced and authoritarian forms
- a racial/ethnic hierarchy that privileges European people over non-European people
- a gender hierarchy that privileges males over females
- a sexual hierarchy that privileges heterosexuals over LGBTQ+
- a spiritual hierarchy that privileges Christians over non-Christian/non-Western spiritualities
- an epistemic hierarchy that privileges Western knowledge over non-Western knowledges – a hierarchy that is institutionalised in the global university system
- a pedagogical hierarchy where Cartesian western forms of pedagogy are considered superior over non-Western forms and practices of pedagogy

A *discourse* refers to the way language is used to shape what and how we think about our lives, our relationships with others, and society. In the process of classification and labelling, a discourse creates objects and thus impacts on people's lives – how they see themselves, how others see them – and this is what makes a discourse material. *Colonial discourses* are *binary* and *oppositional* because they put White, Western, European peoples, and cultures (who are positioned as rational, modern,

[5] 'Modernity/coloniality' is a concept first used by Anibal Quijano and later developed by Walter Mignolo. It refers to the way in which the concepts (modernity and coloniality) are inseparable – two sides of the same coin.

advanced, and civilised) in opposition to non-White, non-Western, non-European peoples, and cultures (who are positioned as magical, exotic, violent, backward, and uncivilised). Colonial discourses thus render difference (to the Euro-Western standard) as inferior.

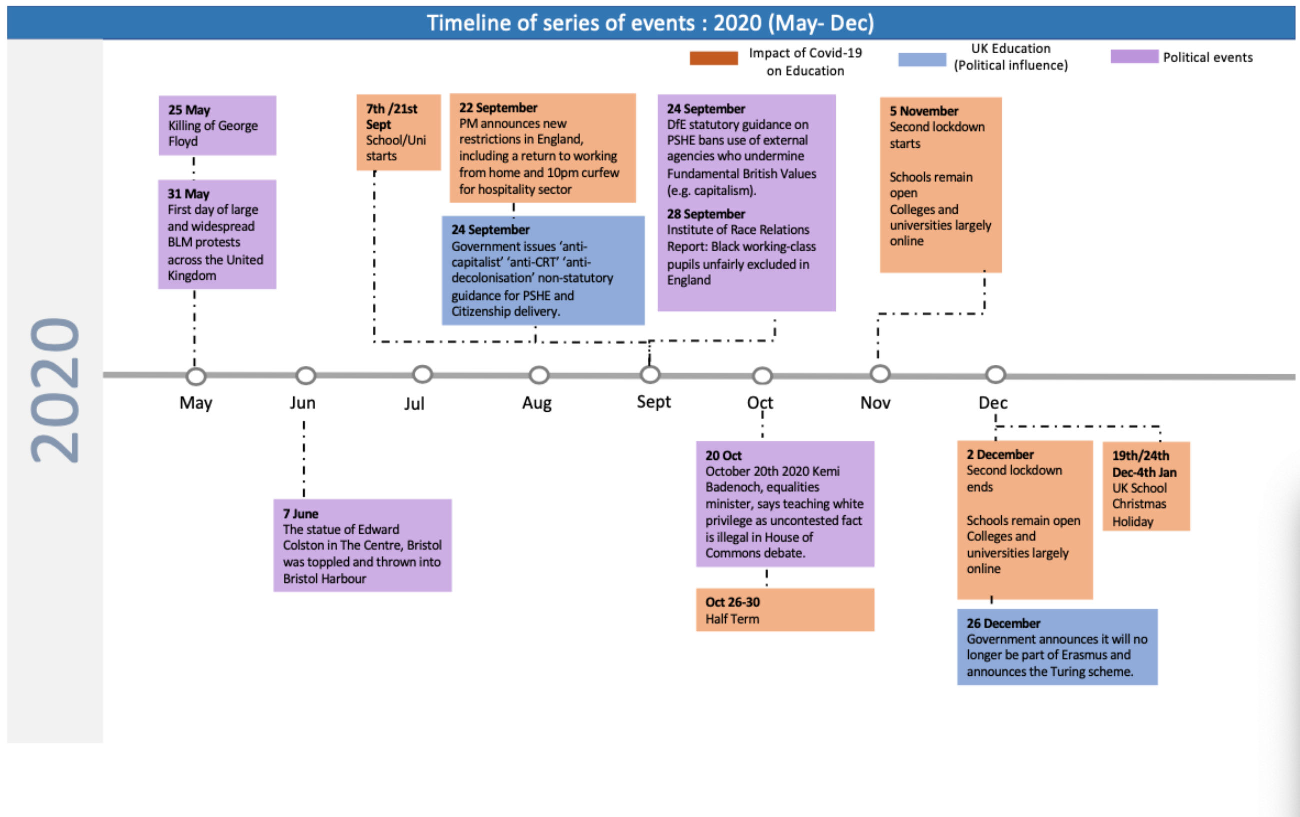
Decolonisation initially described the process by which European colonies, predominantly in Africa, became independent of colonial rule. However, it became clear that independence did not dismantle the systems and structures of colonialism, and that colonisation of the mind (Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, 1986) continued, thus decolonisation has also come to mean the process of *decolonising* the system of modernity/coloniality that dominates the world (Mignolo, 2007). As we have pointed out above, how the process of decolonisation is interpreted will vary according to location and the specific ways in which colonisation and the ongoing forces of coloniality affect the population in that location. In the case of this project, the initial research was conducted in a mid-western province in Canada, a settler-colonial nation (Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2020). The outcomes of the research informed and were adapted for our seminar series, 'De/colonising Educational Relationships,' conducted in the UK, a colonising nation. In the following paragraphs we therefore set out our own understanding of de/colonisation, and why we write it with a forward slash between 'de' and 'colonisation'.

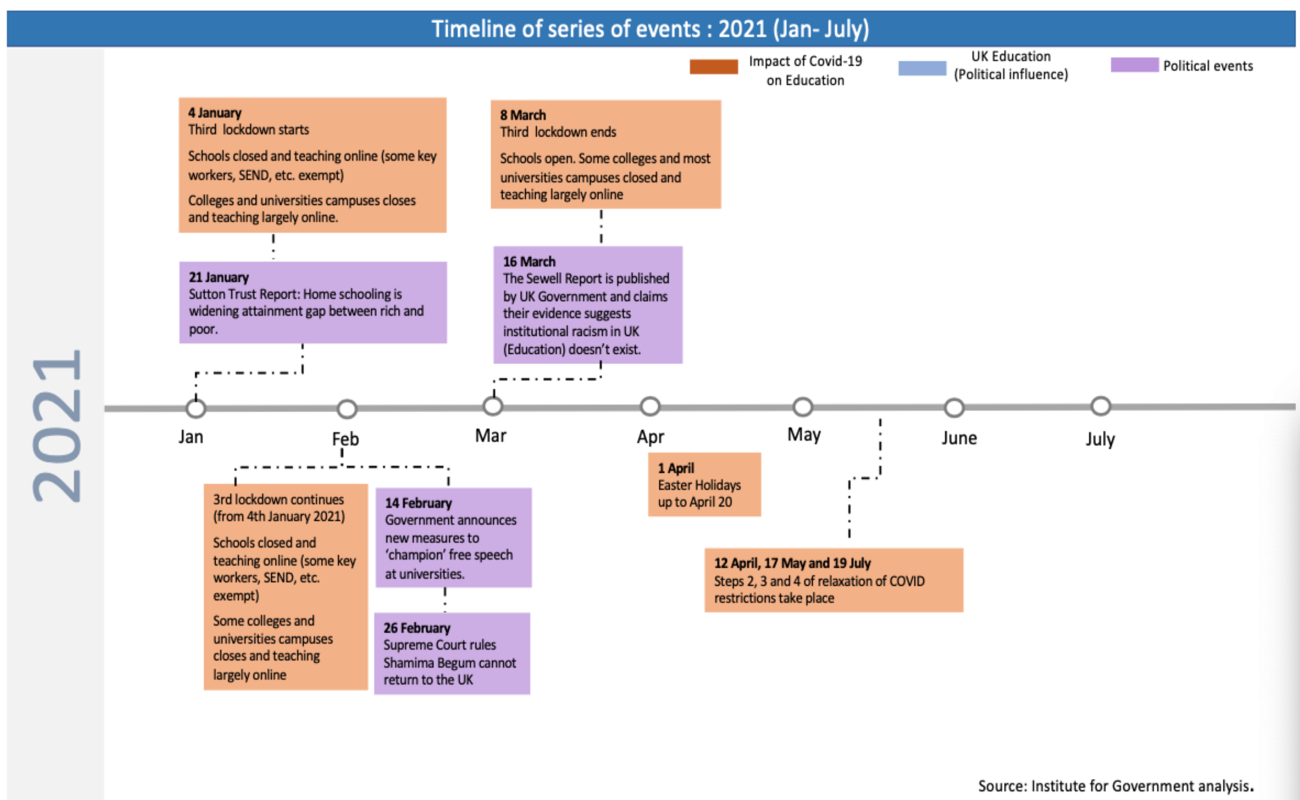
Our use of the forward slash between 'de' and 'colonial' indicates our understanding that there is no utopian decolonising space that is separate from colonising spaces because we are all, always already in "relationship with colonizing discourses and materiality" (Bhattacharya, 2018a, p. 15). We therefore understand de/colonisation as an active, ongoing process of de/colonising the colonial ways of being, doing, knowing, and valuing that infuse western education systems. This implies addressing the nature of coloniality and, in education, including how it has constructed the idea of disciplinary knowledge (as discrete silos and as mechanisms of and for colonialism), how the curriculum and educational spaces are constructed, the modes of student engagement enacted and, so on. However, we have become aware that the increasingly dominant discourse in education is based on a narrow interpretation of decolonisation as decolonising the curriculum. In our view, decolonising the curriculum without considering education itself as a mechanism of colonialism is merely going to act as a sticking plaster while leaving the system that produces colonial relationships intact. This signals to us that it is imperative to understand what those colonising discourses and materiality *are,* and the ways in which we are implicated in them, before we can begin to find ways of 'de-linking' (Mignolo, 2007) from them.

In the following sections we therefore identify some of the ways in which colonial hierarchies and colonising discourses were evident in the specific context within which our project took place. These are summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Timeline of Key Events Leading Up To, and During, the Seminar Series





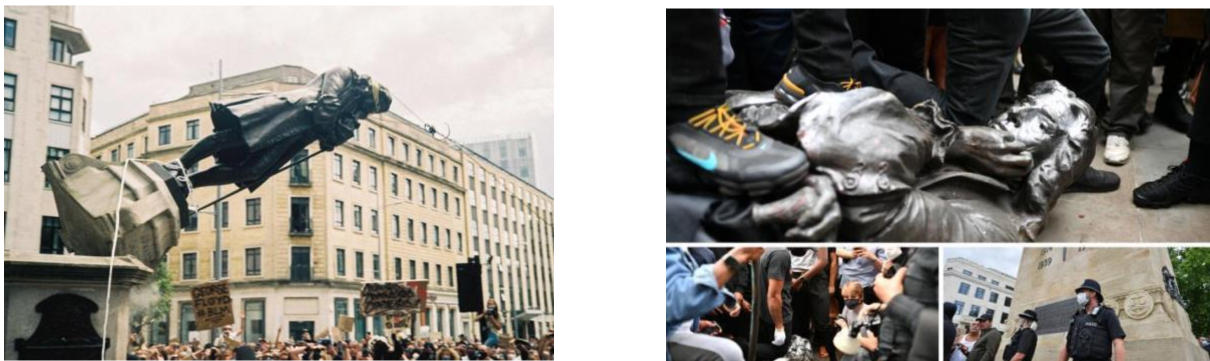
1.2 Socio-Political Context

On 25 May 2020, 8m 43s of video footage were taken by teenager Darnella Fraizer, who witnessed the final moments of life, and brutal death of George Floyd, while in police custody, in Minnesota, USA (Bogel-Burroughs & Fazio, 2021). This shocking footage, widely circulated on social media, acted as a catalyst for socio-political action worldwide, and encouraged billions to engage with discourses which speak to a critical reflection on the assumed truths of global societies, namely the brutalization of black and brown citizens by our institutions. On 7 June 2020, largely mobilised by young people, thousands of people congregated across every region of the United Kingdom to join gatherings in support of the movement for Black lives (Topping et al., 2020).

On the same day, in Bristol, a group of participants at a gathering climbed onto a Grade-II listed statue of 17th century slave-owner, member of parliament and philanthropist Edward Colston, to topple the statue from its plinth and then rolled Colston's statue 150m towards the Bristol harbour and pushed it into the water, next to Pero's Bridge (Figure 3), a site named in commemoration of an enslaved African who lived in the city (Watts, 2020). Colston's elevation as a celebrated son of Bristol has long been contested, with local community groups campaigning for over 40 years to have the truth about the story of Colston recognized – in particular, his significant role in 'Maangamizi', a Swahili term referring to the African holocaust, or transatlantic slave trade. This footage was shown around the world and became the focus of much of the media coverage in the UK. The response from the government reduced the Black Lives Matter movement to a group of hooligans interested in destroying public property and thereby acting contrary to Fundamental British Values[6] (Habib et al., 2021).

Figure 3

Images of the Toppling of Colston Statue in Bristol



[6] "All UK schools are required to teach Fundamental British Values as part of the UK Government's counterterrorism 'Prevent' strategy (Home Office 2015/2021) that aims to reduce the threat to the UK from terrorism by stopping people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. It focuses on all forms of terrorism and operates in a 'pre-criminal' space'. In the UK, the responsibility of primary school curriculum leaders and classroom teachers with regards to the Prevent Duty focuses on spiritual, moral, cultural, mental, and physical education (SMSC). The mainstream discourse is that British terrorists are predominantly Muslim, that British Muslims are not 'true' British citizens because they hold values that are Other to British values (Dearden, 2018; Saeed, 2007), and that education can help to prevent terrorism by promoting Fundamental British Values as part of pupils' SMSC development. In the guidance provided by the Department for Education (DfE, 2014), the examples focus on developing understanding of democracy and the rule of law rather than on identity and belonging" (Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2020).

Note. From *Readers' letters: BLM protests looting and violence* [Photographs], By T. Robins (Swindon Advertiser), 2020 (https://www.swindonadvertiser.co.uk/news/18510234.readers-letters-blm-protests-looting-violence/).

When such events occur, it is often how they are framed politically that determines whether any action is taken to address the systems and structures that maintain the status quo. In the immediate aftermath of the gatherings in June 2021, the widespread protests were condemned by politicians on both sides of the house which, despite being largely peaceful, were considered illegal under the emergency COVID-19 legislation. The home secretary described the protests as ‘dreadful’ because of the pressure they put on police (Sinclair, 2021) and in the months that followed, government legislation and the findings of a commissioned report (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparity, 2021) created an even more challenging environment for decolonising work. For example, in the UK, national education organisations responded to grassroots attempts to decolonise the curriculum by schoolteachers, teacher educators and university lecturers[7]. These attempts were quickly closed down by politicians such as the Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch who, during a debate in October 2020 on Black History Month, stated that the government does not want white children being taught about “white privilege and their inherited racial guilt,” stating that schools have a statutory duty to remain politically impartial and should not openly support “the anti-capitalist Black Lives Matter group” (Murray, 2020). Indeed, from September 2020 onwards it seemed as though the government set about creating policies to silence and outlaw any actions that were perceived as a threat to modernity/coloniality, thereby creating an openly hostile environment for activists who wished to challenge the status quo.

The following are examples of UK government legislation between September 2020 and the end of March 2021 that directly impacted on education.

i) On September 24th, 2020, the Department for Education in England (2020a) published new Statutory Guidance on Plan your relationships, sex and health curriculum. In the section on “using external agencies” the report stated that schools should not “under any circumstances” work with or use material from groups that do not “condemn illegal activities done in their name or in support of their cause” or promote “victim narratives that are harmful to British society.” The guidance also categorised anti-capitalism as an “extreme political stance” and equated it with opposition to freedom of speech, antisemitism, and endorsement of illegal activity (Mohdin, 2020, para. 5). Organisations that felt particularly under attack by this legislation were Extinction Rebellion and Black Lives Matter. Interestingly, when searching for the relevant document on the Department for Education website today (January 5, 2022) it could not be found, indicating that, following legal action taken against the government by the Coalition of Anti-Racist Educators and Black Educators Alliance (Mohdin, 2020), it has been removed from the website while it is under review. Nevertheless, in October 2020 this legislation was in force and provided a hostile environment in which to conduct and study a seminar series on de/colonising educational relationships.

ii) On March 9th, 2021, The *Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill* had its first reading in parliament The Bill specifically targets and limits the freedom to contest statues by raising the

[7] See, for example, the UK National Education Union’s ‘Decolonise Education’ campaign (https://www.nus.org.uk/campaign-hub/decolonise-education) and the UK Higher Education Academy advice on ‘Decolonising the Curriculum’ (https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/decolonisation-curriculum-conversation)

maximum penalty for damaging a memorial from 3 months to ten years imprisonment. In a paper addressing the issues raised by this legislation, the Runnymede Trust argues that,

> Statues typically reflect the ideologies and memories of the dominant group. When these individuals find their own values and experiences depicted in public space, that space becomes a comfortable place that belongs to them. Conversely, … when statues of slavers and colonisers occupy public space, they convey the message that racially minoritised people are unwelcome strangers – a message that is reinforced when these statues are celebrated and 'defended.' (Habib et al., 2021, p. 2)

Generally, statues in public spaces focus on the heroic narratives of the person concerned and the ways in which they have contributed to society. It is very rare that the darker side of their history and how their wealth was made is addressed. In effect this erases the experiences of racially minoritised people that historically were harmed by the actions of the person memorialised. Educationally, even if the role of statues in society is addressed it is often taught through the history curriculum as something that is in the past that can therefore be looked at objectively, resulting in the harms they cause in contemporary society being minimised or ignored. This brings us back to our framing at the beginning of Section 1 around the nation as an imagined community and whose experiences and voices are valued and whose are not.

iii) On March 31st, 2021, the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities Report (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021; popularly known as the Sewell Report) was published. The commission was given the task to investigate the extent to which racial and ethnic disparities continued to exist in the UK and why that might be the case. In a critical analysis of the report, Tikly (2022) shows how, from the point of appointing members of the commission[8], to the focus on disparities rather than inequities, and to the methodology employed to conduct their investigation, the commission was part "of a wider effort to take control of the equalities agenda and to 'change the narrative''' (p. 5) away from Black Lives Matter. The report has been widely criticized for stating that, while there was ample evidence of persistent, race-based discrimination, they found no evidence of institutional racism in the UK. It effectively "repackages racist tropes and stereotypes into fact, twisting data and misapplying statistics and studies into conclusory findings and ad hominem attacks on people of African descent" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021, para. 2). The conclusion in the report indicates that class, family, wealth, culture, and religion were thought to have a more significant impact on life chances than the existence of racism. The chair of the commission, referring to one of the recommendations for education, a "Making of Modern Britain" teaching resource, stated that the resource, "is our response to negative calls for 'decolonising' the curriculum. Neither the banning of White authors nor token expressions of Black achievement will help to broaden young minds" (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparity, 2021, p. 8). This shows a shocking lack of engagement with scholarship on decolonising the curriculum and positions calls to decolonise in education as 'negative,' which we interpret as meaning that it would negatively impact those who have the most to gain by maintaining the status quo.

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[8] See Tikly (2022, p. 5) "The Commission was appointed by Munira Mirza, Head of the Downing Street Policy Unit who had previously stated that she did not believe that institutional racism was responsible for racial disparities (Plummer, 2021). In keeping with the key messages of the report, the commission members were presented by the right-wing press as individuals who had rejected victimhood status and had managed to 'pull themselves up by their own bootstraps' to get where they are today. In stark contrast, the liberal press pointed to the track record of the Chair and members of the Commission. A controversial appointment, Sewell had previously expressed openly homophobic views, which was later retracted (Rawlinson and Dodd, 2020). Indeed, Sewell's appointment had been questioned by the Chair of the Runnymede Trust and had been subject to a legal review. Sewell along with several other members of the Commission had also previously spoken out against the idea of institutional racism and several were known for their right of centre views and history of links with the Tory Party (Plummer, 2021)."

iv) On May 12th, 2021, The *Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill* had its first reading in parliament. The bill aims to place a legal duty on universities to champion free speech, and stamp out "unlawful silencing", upholding the "basic human right to be able to express ourselves freely and take part in rigorous debate" (Department for Education, 2021, p. 2). Universities will face fines, sanctions, and controls if they are unable to satisfy the stated conditions of free speech that ensure that speakers who make derogatory or offensive comments, can activate their right to speak, regardless of whether these breach the institutional demand for a safe space free from discriminatory activity (University of Exeter, 2018).

All the above combined to create a hostile environment in which to conduct a seminar series on de/colonising educational relationships. Even within the government, the Sewell Report seemed to represent a retrograde step in attitudes towards institutional racism and race relations in the UK. A cross-party Home Affairs Committee, tasked with assessing progress on the 70 recommendations of the Macpherson Inquiry[9] into the police investigation following the murder of Black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, in 1993, published their report four months after the Sewell Report (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparity (2021). In a section on the Sewell Report, they noted that the redefining of institutional racism as "applicable to an institution that is racist or [to] discriminatory processes, attitudes, or behaviour in a single institution" (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparity, 2021, p. 36) represented a much narrower interpretation than that put forward by the Macpherson Inquiry. Effectively it reduces institutional racism to the cumulative actions and attitudes of individuals within an organisation rather than as something that is endemic in the systems and structures of the organisation.

In the education sphere the climate was no less controversial with debates taking place over the so-called culture wars, with the media often contributing to the polarisation of such debates (Dorrell, 2021), as we focus on in the following sub-section.

1.3 Educational Context

It was in the socio-political context outlined above that calls to decolonise the curriculum by many students and staff in all phases of education became widespread. At the level of governance, educational institutions began to engage in reflective dialogues, re-evaluating the ways in which they address "issues of institutional racism, and the violent legacies of colonization and transatlantic slavery in particular" (Dhillon, 2021, p. 252). Within higher education these discussions were often led by university wide Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) structures[10]. However, the positioning of decolonisation as an aspect of EDI is, in our view, locating it within a colonial frame and thus any strategic actions from such a position are unlikely to succeed.

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[9] The Macpherson Report (Macpherson, 1999) was a landmark report that defined institutional racism as "The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin." (para. 6.4, p. 49). In particular, the inquiry found the police force to be institutionally racist in its dealings with people of Black, African Caribbean descent. One marker of this is the ongoing disproportionate application of police powers to 'stop and search' people suspected of a crime with regards to the Black community (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparity, 2021). For example, in Devon and Cornwall during 2020-2021, Black and African Caribbean people were ten times as likely to be stopped and searched than any other section of the population (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparity, 2021, p. 174).

[10] Since December 2014 (revised June 2018), UK universities governing bodies have a duty to establish a vision for equality, and legal compliance, ensuring that equality, diversity and inclusion sit at the heart of culture and operational delivery (https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/governance-and-policies)

For example, the concepts of equality, diversity and inclusion are presented unquestioningly as a 'good' yet a critical reading of mainstream interpretations of the concepts, and the ways in which they have come into prominence, reveals their colonial foundations. EDI initiatives in UK universities bring together differing responses to the 2010 Equality Act (Bhopal, 2022) and the inequitable experiences of staff and students with regards to their protected characteristics[11]. Bromelow (2021) argues that EDI initiatives, in their obsessive preoccupation with charter marks, are seen as work separate to the core delivery of the sector, particularly if each protected characteristic is making its own demands one by one. The focus of such initiatives is on those aspects of identity that are different from the mainstream and, in relation to the mainstream standard, seen to be deficient. For example, diversity with regard to racialized student populations has predominantly been viewed through three lenses: the deficit lens of academic achievement that positions students as failing (Bean-Folkes & Lewis-Ellison, 2018[12]); the representation lens of widening participation which focuses on breaking down barriers to higher education for under-represented groups, but does not address barriers to success that they experience when they get there (Maylor, 2010); and the economic lens that positions international students as 'cash cows' (Fazackerley, 2021). Inclusion and inclusive education are terms that initially referred mainly to Special Educational Needs and Disability and were only broadened in their usage as they became linked with diversity and the discourses of "support for all" and "celebrating diversity" (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021, p. 2256).

Historically, marginalised and minoritised students in the UK who are deemed to be 'failing' educationally have long been subject to deficit theorising (Eller, 1989) with their families/communities being labelled as the 'problem.' Teachers and lecturers are also subject to the same discourse (Stacey, 2019). Deficit theorising enables education institutions to evade being implicated in those 'failures' and, at the same time, evades viewing them as related to the system and its colonial roots. One only has to look at the work of scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Jason Arday, Stephen Ball, Gurminder Bhambra, Kalwant Bhopal, David Gillborn, Paul Gilroy and Paul Warmington to see the long history of scholars engaging in the damaging effect of the UK education system on marginalised and minoritised students. However, educational inequities remain remarkably persistent for some groups, for example, black Caribbean students in UK schools are five times more likely to be excluded and Gypsy Roma students are nine times more likely to be excluded than students from any other community (Demie, 2019; Department for Education, 2020b).

It is perhaps for these reasons that decolonisation has been broadly equated with issues of race and racism, with other aspects of identity (around gender, ability, religion, sexuality and so on) largely missing from the discussions. While we agree that race-based equity should be at the centre of decolonising efforts, we also argue that all other forms of inequity based on the hierarchies described by Grosfoguel (2011) should be integral to any discussions and actions about decolonising education. Not to do so would reinforce the colonial logic of separation.

It is only more recently that such inequities have been located within a wider decolonial framework (e.g., Arday & Mirza, 2018; Bhambra et al., 2018). Within the UK, the call to decolonize education has largely been driven by students (School of Oriental and African Studies [SOAS], 2017; Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities [CRASSH], 2017), but since the murder of

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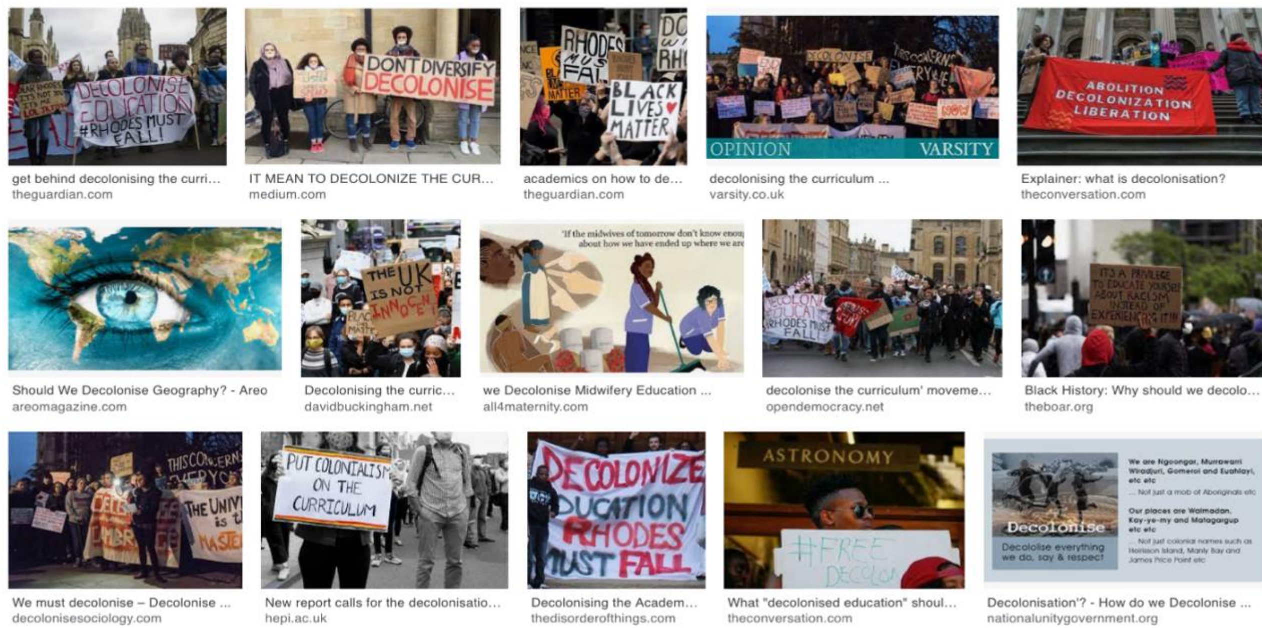
[11] The UK Equality Act, 2010, defines protected characteristics as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Since 2010 it has been illegal for employers to discriminate against someone because of their protected characteristic(s).

[12] Bean-Folkes & Lewis-Ellison (2018, p. 216) highlight that "there is a lineage of deficit-view approaches in education, such as the prevention of slaves from learning to read and write and consistent stereotypical biases and assumptions from teachers, administrators, faculty, and policymakers about Black students as underperformers in academic grades and test scores."

George Floyd and the subsequent worldwide protests, these calls have multiplied and been amplified – reflected in the proliferation of events, seminars and workshops on decolonising education that have been freely available online during the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 4). However, the emphasis has been on ‘decolonizing the curriculum’ (Tidman, 2021) and on epistemological rather than ontological change. The form that the majority of online seminars take - one-off events given by well-known scholars in the field as webinars to a large, global audience - in our view supports the delivery of content but does not allow for any form of relationship between the speaker and the audience. As we expand on in Section 2.3, our seminar series consisted of nine seminars conducted over one academic year for a single university, which enabled us to develop a relationship with our audience. In our seminars we did not just cover content, we also shared personal narratives and made explicit how, through our shared experiences and critical self-reflectivity on those experiences, we had made ourselves vulnerable to each other as part of our processes of [un]learning (see also Section 4.2.6).

Figure 4

Screenshot of a Google Search for Decolonising Education Seminars in 2020-2021



It seems as if the language of decoloniality, as with the themes of anti-racism and social justice in education, has been appropriated by institutions and practitioners as the latest ‘interest convergence’ (Bell, 1980) to demonstrate a commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion and to locate it within the existing structures of higher education. In the context of the University of Exeter, where this project is located, there has been a significant amount of activity engaging with themes of anti-racism, social justice, and decoloniality. There are several projects, developed by collaborative communities of students, academics, and community, which engage in a range of ways with decolonisation. Some projects are strategically supported by the university through the existing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion unit, which is embedded in the university’s strategic plan; some are supported by internal grants (such as this project, part-funded by the Centre for Social Mobility); while others are supported by the Exeter Decolonising Network, an informal network of staff and students that was formed in 2019 and currently sits outside the formal university structures. Among

this frenzy of activity, both locally and nationally, there are cautionary voices that warn of the risks of, for example: decolonisation being another ‘bandwagon’ (Moosavi, 2020); institutions capturing the decolonisation agenda within current (colonial) systems and structures (Saini, 2020) and thus preventing any meaningful change; and rushing to act before developing deep understanding of the complex and contested nature of decolonisation (Bhambra et al., 2018).

In a similar vein to Grosfoguel (2011), over the course of our involvement in decolonising activities at the University of Exeter between 2020-2021, we found that many of the teachers and educators who have been motivated to take action with regard to decolonising their curricula have been less enthusiastic to acknowledge and understand their own complicities in the colonial world system. There was enormous energy behind the need to do something in the immediate aftermath of George Floyd’s murder, with universities quickly hiring, or internally appointing, scholars of colour[13] to lead the work. Grewal (2021) argues that this is driven by the corporatisation of universities and their desire to present themselves as progressive, but that this way of thinking is based on a colonial logic and,

> leads to excessive usage, misguided endeavours, rushed projects and an intransigent determination to see results. Such a way of approaching ‘decolonisation’ does more harm not only to colleagues, students, and their environments but also to the legacy of decolonial thought. In this way, institutions are prone to reproducing colonial logics by exploiting, commodifying, and diluting the very ‘thing’ that was to set us free. (para. 5)

In summary, the protests across the United Kingdom in response to the murder of George Floyd, and the wider movement for Black Lives (termed ‘Black Lives Matters’) has been unsettling for teachers and educators. In the South-West of England, where the overwhelming majority of teachers and educators are racialized as ‘white British’, there is a continued hesitancy to explicitly name racism and to engage with critical concepts of de/colonisation in education. However, we recognise that some of this reticence to engage may be because teachers and teacher educators are also limited by the legal frameworks put on them by the Department for Education and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)[14]. Nevertheless, little recognition is given to the fundamental reality that the education system is a colonial and colonising space, and therefore those of us who work in the field are, by default, complicit in upholding it.

1.4 Conducting an Inquiry Project During a Pandemic

Our project was conceived, developed, and completed while we were in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although our original hope, in July 2020, was that while seminars would have to initially be given online, that as the pandemic waned and restrictions eased, we would move to face-to-face seminars. As we now know, COVID-19 would affect nations in waves and, in the UK, varying levels of social restrictions have severely disrupted education and research. Following the initial lockdown in England between March – July 2020 there have been two further lockdowns, November 2020 for 4 weeks, and January 2021 for 8 weeks. During the academic year of 2020-21 schools, colleges and universities have had varied patterns from being fully closed with remote teaching, to partially open

[13] Based on our own engagement with academics given a lead role in this work, their appointments were driven by an understanding of diversity as representation which in itself has limitations (de Oliveira, 2021), not least the burden placed on scholars of colour to do the work and to be accountable.
[14] For example, State schools and Initial Teacher Education programmes have a statutory duty to follow the National Curriculum and can be penalised for deviating from this when inspected by Ofsted.

for different age groups, to being fully open but subject to students and staff having to self-isolate if they had COVID symptoms or, latterly, a positive result to a COVID test. This has affected the project in several ways:

- the seminar presentations, interactions with participants and the methods of inquiry all had to be virtual
- many academics, professional staff and graduate students were experiencing 'zoom' fatigue
- although all presentations were video-recorded and made available for asynchronous viewing, many educators did not have the time to watch them because of their increased workloads as they moved from predominantly face-to-face teaching to teaching entirely online
- during lockdown, many educators with children had to juggle their work at the University of Exeter with home-schooling and childcare
- the conceived relational, dialogic nature of the project was restricted by the online format; however, it enabled those who might not have been able otherwise, to attend - for example, a number of academics attended from other UK universities and overseas locations

Some of these situations contributed in unexpected ways to the project, including the methods of inquiry, as we discuss in Sections 2 and 3 below.

2. The Inquiry Project

In 2020, staff and doctoral students at the University of Exeter were invited to take part in a series of seminars, where participants would explore the ways in which our de/colonial[15] imaginary (Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2020), developed in a Canadian teacher education context, could be adapted for a UK context. Over a series of eight sessions hosted via digital technologies, the seminar series encouraged participants to think about how to work towards de/colonising educational relationships. Drawing upon Grosfoguel (2011), Bhattacharya (2018a; 2018b) and others, Pirbhai-Illich and Martin expanded on these and theorised how the concepts of critical relationality using concepts of invitation, hospitality, space, place and boundaries and spirituality could inform de/colonial ways of being, viewing and doing education otherwise. In this section we give an overview of the Canadian context within which the inquiry was originally conducted, followed by a brief commentary on the issues we considered when deciding how to apply our learning to education in the UK.

2.1 The Canadian Context

The studies on which this project is based took place over a period of twelve years in the settler colonial context of a mid-western university located in Saskatchewan, one of the Prairie Provinces of Canada. The Prairie Provinces were settled by the federal government through the Homestead Act (1872). The Act gave 160 acres free of charge to any male farmer of European descent who agreed to cultivate at least 40 acres and who would build a permanent dwelling on the land within three years. The Indigenous population[16] were moved onto reserve lands during this period, while European immigrants were moved in.

[15] See p. 3 of this report for a discussion of our use of the forward slash in de/colonising

[16] In Canada, the term Indigenous refers to three groups of peoples: First Nations (FN), Métis (i.e., people of mixed white and First Nations ancestry) and Inuit. For the purposes of this paper, we use the term Indigenous and First Nations interchangeably.

The Indian Act (1876) gave the government "sweeping powers with regards to First Nations identity, political structures, governance, cultural practices and education ... that restricted Indigenous freedoms and allowed officials to determine Indigenous rights and benefits based on 'good moral character'" (The Canadian Encyclopaedia, 2006, para. 6). The Indian Act also gave the government powers to forcibly remove Indigenous children from their families and enrol them in residential schools, where they often experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Furthermore, Indigenous people were not allowed to leave the reserves without permission and were policed by Indian agents through the pass system. The last residential school closed in 1996, and it was not until 2008 that Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up to "document the truth of all survivors, families, and communities affected by the residential schools system, and to guide all Canadians together through processes of reconciliation in a spirit of respect and understanding", (Acadia University, 2015a, para. 2), and the final report of which was published in 2015 with 94 Calls to Action. Of particular relevance to teacher education is the TRC Call to Action #63 which asks for:|

> the commitment of the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada to maintain a commitment to Aboriginal education issues; from creating and applying the use of K-12 curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples Canadian history, including the tragic history of residential schools, to developing an intercultural understanding and identifying appropriate teacher-training needs to address these issues. (Acadia University, 2015b).

Settler colonisation has had a continuous and long-lasting effect on Indigenous populations. Ongoing racist and discriminatory practices that are embedded in legal and education systems continue to fail Indigenous populations of Canada. For example, half of all Indigenous children live in poverty and there is an over-representation of Indigenous children in foster care. The proportion of Indigenous adults with a high school diploma is 52% compared to 82% for the rest of the Canadian population (Indigenous Services Canada, 2020a). Disproportionality is also seen in the prison system where 25% of those incarcerated are Indigenous, although they only make up 4.9% of Canada's total population (Indigenous Services Canada, 2020b). The effect of these discriminatory systems and the intergenerational trauma resulting from the ongoing violences of colonisation (Lawson-Te & Lui, 2010) is perhaps reflected in the fact that suicide rates for Indigenous peoples are five to seven times the national average.

It was within this context that a culturally responsive literacy education course was developed for final year Bachelor of Education and Postgraduate pre-service teachers, and in-service teachers who were enrolled in a post-graduate Special Education certificate program. The course was the focus of a longitudinal study conducted between 2009-2019, a major outcome of which was the development of an 'imaginary for de/colonising educational relationships' (Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2020) that was adapted for the UK and the inquiry project reported here.

2.2 Adaptations for the UK Context

Gopal (2021) asks, "Is decolonisation relevant at all [to education] in Britain and other former colonial centres?" (p. 873). We were already asking this question as we attended various European conferences to disseminate our work. Our response in the affirmative is based, in part, on our

understanding of the world as interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent. Coloniality is a 'global matrix of power' (Quijano, 2007) or 'world system' (Grosfoguel, 2011) in which we are all embroiled; thus, decolonisation requires "a complete calling into question of the colonial system", where all those caught up in its purview, whether native or settler, coloniser or colonised, are fundamentally transformed (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 36).

Therefore, while we understand that there is no universal approach to decolonisation, we do believe that the *need* to decolonise is universal. What that would entail would be responsive to each context and the socio-historical, geo-political and environmental influences on specific places and cultures. What is appropriate in a settler nation such as Canada will not translate directly into what is appropriate in a nation such as the UK which is at the centre of colonialism. Equally, within each location, what is appropriate for those involved in "low-intensity (also low-risk and low-stakes) struggles" will differ from what is appropriate for "those involved in high-intensity struggles"[17] (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 52). We therefore adapted our work (see Section 2.3), that had been developed in Saskatchewan with pre- and in-service teachers, to be responsive to the contexts and the hierarchies of power in the UK, as we outlined in Section 1. These adaptations were developed on the basis of our knowledge of, and relationship with, the Graduate School of Education (GSE) at the University of Exeter. Fatmakhanu (fatima) has been working in partnership with the GSE Creativity and Emergent Educational-futures Network (CEEN) since 2016 and was appointed an honorary professor by the University of Exeter in 2020; Fran was employed as a senior lecturer in the GSE in 2006 and, since retiring in 2017, has continued to work with members of CEEN as an honorary research fellow.

A collaborative approach was taken, with the inquiry team working together with an advisory group and Lifeworlds (a community interest company), whose composition is shown below.

Inquiry Team
Fatmakhanu (fatima) Pirbhai-Illich, Professor and PI, University of Regina
Fran Martin, Research Fellow and Co-I, University of Exeter
Willow Iorga, Graduate (MA) Student and RA, University of Regina
Malcolm Richards, Doctoral Researcher and RA, University of Exeter
Reema Mustafee, Contract Researcher and RA, University of Exeter

Advisory Group
Corinne Greaves (Graduate School of Education [GSE] school partnership office),
Ruth Flanagan (Lead, Post Graduate Certificate in Education [PGCE], Primary),
Lindsay Hetherington (Head of Initial Teacher Education [ITE]),
Helen Knowler (Coordinator, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion [EDI]),
Kerry Chappell (Lead, Creativity and Emergent Educational-futures Network [CEEN])
Sana Rizvi (Lead, Race, Ethnicity and Education Network [REEN]),
Thomas Ralph (Lead, PGCE, Secondary),
Riadh Ghemmour (Doctoral Student, REEN).

[17] "The term low-intensity refers to those who have benefited the most and still enjoy the protections that modernity offers, as they fight to change things within or beyond modernity. Those in low-intensity struggles have a choice to show up or not, to become visible or not, to be arrested or not, to take risks or not. … In contrast, those involved in high-intensity struggles are communities whose lives subsidize the comforts and securities that those who have benefited the most enjoy. Some people in high-intensity (and high-risk, high-stakes) struggles are fighting to be part of modernity. Others are fighting for the possibility of a different existence." (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 52)

Lifeworlds
Rob Bowden, Doctoral Researcher at the University of Northumbria and Director of Lifeworlds.
Rosie Wilson, Secondary School Teacher and Co-director of Lifeworlds.

Engagement with Advisory Group.

The Principal Investigator (PI) and Co-Investigator (Co-I) met with the advisory group twice in July 2020, following an invitation from the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) team to give some presentations on decolonisation to the students during the autumn term. Following these meetings, we were invited to also provide a series of seminars for academic and administrative staff on decolonising education. We then met again in mid-September to finalise the program and to discuss the methods of inquiry. By this time, we had secured funding from the University of Regina Faculty of Education's Centre for Educational Research, Collaboration, & Development (CERCD) to conduct an inquiry focusing on what was learnt as a result of engaging with the seminars. We had also applied for funding from the University of Exeter, Graduate School of Education's Centre for Social Mobility in November 2020 and heard at the beginning of December that it had been successful. Further meetings with the advisory group were held in January and March 2021 to share progress and discuss any issues arising with regards to the success of the project.

Engagement with Lifeworlds

The PI and Co-I had already established a relationship and liaised with members from Lifeworlds on previous occasions, including a two-day seminar on Decolonising Teacher Education at the University of Exeter in 2017 (Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017a). Lifeworlds specialises in professional development for individuals and organisations to engage with, explore, and understand the role of values in education. Lifeworlds, known for its ethical stance, has over ten years' experience in translating the latest academic understanding around values into educational processes, content, and pedagogy. As our project partner, they contributed significantly to the pedagogical / online activities aspect of seminars 1-6 and led seminars 7 and 8.

2.3 Acknowledging Academic Elders (And Contemporaries)

In this section we outline the theoretical foundations for the seminar series. In doing so, we acknowledge the academic elders (and contemporaries) whose work has inspired us. We are also acknowledging that, "No knowledge is so unique that it rests on its own merit. We are a community of knowledge makers who are extending a conversation" (Bhattacharya, 2022, personal communication).

The invitation from the Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter, to work with staff and students on decolonisation provided an opportunity to see if the de/colonial imaginary we developed in a Canadian teacher education context could be adapted for the UK – in essence, can the colonisers be decolonized? Much work on decolonising higher education has already been achieved in the UK, focusing on systemic racialised discourses (Doharty et al., 2021), diversity and teacher education (Elton-Chalcraft, et al., 2017), and decolonising learning and teaching (School of Oriental and African Studies [SOAS], 2018). The focus of our work is de/colonising educational *relationships* (Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2020); our key aim in working with University of Exeter faculty, administrative staff and doctoral students was therefore to develop their understanding of how it might be possible to create de/colonial spaces for learning within their programs. In this we drew on our own work (Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017b; Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2020) which was inspired by

scholarship from Whiteness studies (Leonardo, 2009; DiAngelo, 2011; Matias, 2016; Wekker, 2016), Black studies (Warmington, 2019), Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Rollock & Gillborn, 2011), Decoloniality (Mignolo, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2011; Battiste, 2013; Cote-Meek, 2014; Bhattacharya, (2018a: 2018b); Machado de Oliveira, 2021), Spirituality and Relationality (Buber, 1923/1958; Anzaldúa, 1999; Derrida, 2000; Bhattacharya, 2020), Critical Interculturality (Walsh, 2010; Aman, 2017; Grillo, 2017) and Multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996).

2.3.1 De/Colonising Our Praxis as Educators

The analysis of colonial ways of being, doing and knowing we described in Section 1 provides us with a way forward for understanding how we can begin to move into de/colonial spaces in which to theorise and practice. Inspired by the work of Keating (2016) and Bhattacharya (2017), we describe this as a *post-oppositional* space that involves a politics of refusal, because we *refuse* to continue dividing the world through our praxis, in binary, oppositional, either/or ways. Our use of the term *praxis* is an example of this, as it represents our understanding that theory and practice are not separate entities; they are inextricably entangled, always already in relation with each other in the same way that decoloniality is always in relationship with coloniality. Therefore, although we refuse to continue engaging in oppositional praxis, we do not reject coloniality because that would be tantamount to refusing its existence. Rather, we understand that merely by being alive we embody coloniality because we have each, in different ways, had our identities shaped by it. We also understand that, because there is no utopian decolonial space (Bhattacharya, 2018a; 2018b), we are complicit in perpetuating the systems and structures that uphold colonialism while also, *at the same time,* seeking to disrupt them. It is for this reason that our praxis is conducted in a space of *critical inter-relation*, which aims to de/colonise *educational relationships* rather than decolonising the curriculum. This praxis is one in which we develop theory by paying close attention to the ways in which we relate to each other - a conscious, hyper-self-reflexivity in which we draw on our differing experiences of coloniality to understand our intersubjective relations.

In this respect, the seminar series was one in which we aspired to demonstrate different ways of being, valuing, knowing, and relating through our praxis, which we also made explicit. We focus on de/colonising educational *relationships* because it is these that supposedly support educational systems. Social and educational systems do not act separately from the people who uphold them, so if a system is doing harm, it is only doing so because we are all, albeit to different degrees, complicit in those harms. If the system is objectified as external to our own complicity, it makes it possible to see it as separate to us, to vilify it and want to change it as if it creates harm without our involvement – another, better system is all that is needed. If we do not acknowledge our complicities or change our own habits of mind and being and the ways in which we are implicated in the system, then we will carry those habits of mind and being with us. Therefore, de/colonising our praxis and, through our roles as teacher educators, working with pre-service teachers to de/colonise their praxis, involves:

- Raising awareness of, and developing a critical understanding of coloniality
- Identifying and acknowledging our relationship with, and complicity in, colonising ways of being, doing and knowing and how this influences our identities and practices
- Pluralising (and thereby expanding what is considered legitimate) the range of perspectives and knowledges we draw on to help us reflect on and expand our beliefs and worldviews
- Grounding this in post-oppositional, critically relational pedagogies

A series of nine seminars, approximately one per month, was provided for faculty, administrative staff, and doctoral students between October 2020 – July 2021 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Focus of Seminars: October 2020-July 2021

	Focus	Rationale
Oct 2020	Coloniality and de/coloniality	Understanding what the issues are; freeing minds of colonial ideology
Nov 2020	Whiteness, decentering whiteness, and teacher ontologies	
Dec 2020	Race & racism in education	
Jan 2021	Educational relations: spirituality and relationality	An imaginary for de/colonising educational relations
Feb 2021	Educational relations: invitation and hospitality	
March 2021	Educational relations: space, place & boundaries	
May 2021	Critical pedagogies of inter-relation	Implications for teaching & research
June 2021	Bringing it all together: An imaginary for de/colonising educational relationships	
July 2021	De/colonising research and scholarship	

The initial seminars (1-3) focused on the coloniality of education and identities; their relation to colonising ways of being, doing and viewing; and the ways in which these might be expressed in their educational relationships. We view understanding the self and one's 'coloniality of being' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) as an essential precursor to introducing our imaginary for de/colonising educational relationships (seminars 4-6) in which we theorise the concepts of spirituality; invitation and hospitality; spaces, places, and boundaries. In the final seminars (7-9) we used practical, interactive activities to collaboratively consider the implications of our imaginary for teaching, research, and scholarship in higher education. Between October and December 2020, the seminars were advertised to members of the Graduate School of Education. Following the award of funding from the University of Exeter, Centre for Social Mobility (CfSC) in December 2020, we were requested to extend the invitation to faculty, administrative staff, and doctoral students across the whole university.

2.4 Inquiry Questions

The initial focus of the inquiry was to understand the ways in which faculty in the teacher education programmes would engage with the ideas of coloniality and de/coloniality in education, and how these understandings would affect their individual praxis within the formal systems and structures of the two Post Graduate Certificate of Education programs (Primary and Secondary). Our inquiry questions were:

1. What do faculty, administrative staff and doctoral students learn about themselves and their praxis from a seminar series on de/colonising educational relationships in teacher education?
2. What might be the possibilities for change to their own teaching and assessment?
3. What spaces for de/colonising educational relationships within their programmes might be created as a result?

For a variety of reasons, we had to adapt these questions as the seminar series progressed. Firstly, of the faculty, administrative staff and doctoral students attending from the Graduate School of Education, very few were from the Teacher Education (PGCE) programmes. We explain possible reasons for this in the findings section. Secondly, the University of Exeter Social Mobility Grant stipulated that we opened the series up to the whole university. For these reasons we broadened our focus from Teacher Education to Higher Education. In addition to the questions above we asked the question:

4. What do faculty, administrative staff and doctoral students learn about coloniality and de/coloniality from the seminar series?

3. Methodology and Methods of Inquiry

A study that focuses on de/colonising educational relationships requires a de/colonising methodology - from the articulation of the project itself, to the inquiry questions through to the analysis and presentation of findings. Therefore, while we draw on scholarship on decolonising and Indigenising research (Battiste, 2011; Smith, 2012; Darder, 2019; Chilisa, 2020; Mignolo, 2021), we also explain the ways in which our own praxis in de/colonising our methodology and methods differs from these accounts. To clarify, we are not suggesting that our approach has any more or less validity than decolonising and Indigenising methodologies. Rather, our theoretical position (Section 2.3) and the context of our inquiry (Section 1) are different from those of Battiste, Smith, Darder, Chilisa and Mignolo. Presenting a clear example of what a de/colonising inquiry project might look like viz-a-vis the contexts in which our project was conducted is therefore in keeping with a pluriversal understanding of the world and is intended to be helpful to those who may similarly wish to adapt current scholarship to their specific contexts.

To begin with, most decolonising and Indigenous research methodologies texts assume that research investigations focus on racialised, minoritized, and marginalised groups. This is not the case for us. Our inquiry project was conducted in England, the centre of the British Empire and colonialism. The audience for the seminar series was academics and administrative staff (the majority of whom are white British) and doctoral students (who identified as either white British, Black and South Asian British, and international students from China, the Middle East and Africa). The project's team were also from varied intersecting backgrounds including those that identified as white British, Black Jamaican British, white settler Canadian, South Asian Canadian and South Asian. Tuck & McKenzie (2015) argue that methodological approaches need "to critically engage with place and the embeddedness of social life in and with specific places" (p. 2). Our methodology for this project is therefore selected in relationship to the specifics of the place in which the seminar series was conducted, the places in which participants' identities and relationships with coloniality will have been formed, and with the aims of the project as reflected in our inquiry questions (Section 2.4).

In addition, most decolonising and Indigenous methodology texts argue that this type of research, due to its emancipatory purposes, should be "deeply anchored upon the a-priori communal knowledge of the subaltern voices emerging from the communities in which they labour" (Darder, 2019, p. 5) and thus should be conducted by those who hold subaltern knowledges of what it means to be oppressed, disenfranchised, minoritized, and marginalised in society. Again, our context and therefore purposes differed from this in two key ways: our project was an application of the findings

from longitudinal research, conducted in a settler-colonial context, to education in a British context; our purpose was to emancipate all who engage in the seminars, and thereby their learners, from the tyranny of colonial, Euro-western, education systems and the colonial relationships they reproduce. However, Darder's comments also remind us of the importance of making explicit the subjectivities and positionalities of those who are undertaking the inquiry (see Section 3.1). It is for these reasons that we took a critical, intercultural, interrelational approach to the inquiry project that we conceptualised as de/colonising because it both recognises and explores the interconnected nature of coloniality and decoloniality in the specific contexts we describe above.

To our knowledge, a de/colonising methodology as applied to empirical inquiry projects has not yet been articulated in accord with our praxis as project inquirers, by which we mean working together in the inter-spaces between our different subject positions. The approach we take to our collaborative work is based on the premise that the spaces, places, and boundaries in society and, in particular, of formal education, including institutions of higher education, are sites of critical intercultural inter-relation, interconnection, and interdependence. Therefore, any project in de/colonising the spaces in which educational relationships are enacted has to take account of the histories behind those in relation, including their relations to and with the land. Our praxis as educators and inquirers is an exploration of the 'inter' spaces of such relations, drawing on our own situated narratives and the conversations we have had about shared experiences to which we have brought our differing lenses. This has been central to what we understand to be a de/colonising approach to knowledge production in which our own 'street theories' and 'folk knowledges' (Bhattacharya, 2019) are given a legitimate place alongside other knowledges that are outside the academic gaze, and then put in conversation with theories and knowledges that are privileged in academia. In a sense we are making visible what it means for our different subject positions (and all that these entail) to co-exist. Not in a combative or competitive way, but in a post-oppositional (see Keating, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2018b) dialogue that we approach with humility (setting aside the ego that is symptomatic of coloniality/modernity). Through our dialogic inter-actions, we are not seeking to persuade each other to come to our way of thinking, but rather to open our boundaries to the possibility of coming to know differently and thus of expanding our subject positions.

For us, therefore, a de/colonising methodology does not mean a rejection of Euro-Western methods, but a decentering of the overall approach within which we use those methods and ensuring that, at every step, our enacting of them is "informed by relational ontologies, relational epistemologies and relational accountability" (Chilisa, 2020, p. 24). In this we were guided by the four Rs: "accountable responsibility, respectful representation, reciprocal appropriation, and rights and regulations during the research process" (Chilisa, 2020, p. 24). As participant-inquirers, we were materially and socially entangled in the project. We consciously worked in a dialogic way with theory in our everyday practice, troubling dominant Euro-Western research methodologies that, through their colonial lineages, extract, appropriate and use the knowledges of others in order to dominate and control (Smith, 2012). In other words, our approach to the inquiry went "beyond the hubris of perpetual mastery" (Hart et al., 2018, p. 78), which involved letting go of the need to know (Bhattacharya, 2021, personal communication) and paying care-full attention to the knowledges that participants brought to the conversations we held with them.

3.1 Locating the Inquiry Team Positionalities

In accordance with our methodology, in this section we make explicit our subjectivities and positionalities with regard to the project's focus. This is an essential part of any de/colonising project because, as the forward slash between 'de' and 'colonial' indicates, we are all in relation with

coloniality in one way or another. Becoming critically aware of our colonial relations and our knowledges as variously privileged and oppressed individuals, as well as the community knowledges of privilege and oppression, is part of a process of conscientization that Darder (2019) argues is a crucial first step in decolonising our inquiry processes. The subjectivities inherent in our subject positions influenced how we related to the concepts we introduced through the seminar series, what our biases are, the complicities of our positions in the work, and thus how we conducted the study, including the writing of this report[18] (Bhattacharya & Varbelow, 2014). Similarly, working dialogically to co-create knowledge in the spaces between our subject positions - with participants in the inquiry and focus group conversations, and with research assistants when analysing the transcripts required us to be conscious of how our subjectivities affected how we related to the plural knowledges encountered during the project. In the following, members of the inquiry team provide a brief description of their identities. We acknowledge that identity is complex, in constant flux, a contradictory concept and that not all social identities are included here. We have chosen to note just a few aspects to provide the reader with some understanding of the differing lenses that the team brought to the inquiry.

Willow Iorga is a White cis female and grew up on a small gulf island off the West Coast of Canada, in a community of artists, musicians, and people living alternative lifestyles. She was home-schooled off and on throughout her childhood. Willow completed her undergraduate degree in Geography and later returned to complete a postgraduate degree in Education to become a teacher, like her father. She has worked alongside fatima as a research assistant on three research projects between the period 2006-2021. Her master's level research focuses on heritage language loss and the consequences for identity development. Willow is a single mother to a 9-year-old daughter, who she has raised alone for the past 7 years.

Reema Mustafee was born and brought up in India and moved to the UK in 2010. She completed her post-graduate degree at a UK university and has worked for the last two years as a contract researcher in the south-west of England. Reema's formal education and first degree were undertaken in India. Her post-graduate dissertation focused on ethnicity, inequality and migration, the long history of British colonisation in India and her own experience of ethnicity in that context.

Fran Martin is White-European, a member of the LGBTQ+ community, a twin, and a farmer's daughter, born and raised in the south-east of England. Fran has relatives in Australia and New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa. The whole of her formal education as a student was in fee paying and/or independent schools. Fran has worked for over 35 years in the education sector, as a primary school teacher 1980-1993, and then as a teacher educator in the university sector until her retirement in 2017. Fran is now an honorary research fellow at the University of Exeter, United Kingdom. She has worked in partnership with fatima since 2014.

Fatmakhanu (fatima) Pirbhai-Illich is a racialised cis-female, Canadian citizen, born in Tanganyika to African parents of Indian descent. She was educated in Tanzania, Kenya, Canada and England, and has lived and worked across the world, including New Zealand and Australia, China, Singapore and Saudi Arabia. fatima has worked in education for 30 years. She is Professor of Language and Literacy Education in the Faculty of Education, at the University of Regina, Canada and has been involved in this work on Culturally Responsive Pedagogies and de/colonisation since 2007.

[18] We agree with "Maria Lugones (2003) critique of writers who employ a disclaimer, in which all self-reflexivity is cordoned off into a sub-section … which admits to one's limitations as a result of one's positionalities, and then proceeds to write in a universalised authoritarian voice without any further indication that their positionalities are continuing to influence their theorising" (Lucas, 2013, p. 12).

Malcolm Richards is a cis male, racialised, politicised and culturally identifies as Black. The eldest of three children, he was born in London to Caribbean (Guyana and St Lucia) parents of African descent. Malcolm was formally educated in the English school system and is also a graduate of the African Caribbean supplementary school movement. He is a former teacher, senior leader, and advisory teacher in English schools. His current doctoral studies at the University of Exeter focus on the inclusion of the funds of knowledge of Black identities, cultures, and communities in education. Malcolm lives with his wife and two daughters in rural Devon, United Kingdom. Malcolm also identifies as RastafarI.

3.2 Participants

The seminar series was conducted virtually from Oct 2020-July 2021, with one seminar every month. The first three seminars were open to all faculty, administrative staff and graduate students of the Graduate School of Education (GSE) within the College of Social Sciences and International Studies. From January 2021 the invitation was extended to other faculties who were given access to watch the first three seminars on YouTube. Due to the participatory nature of the study, we identify four groups of participants, each of which had different roles and levels of engagement; (i) Seminar attendees; (ii) Lifeworlds-our project partner; (iii) the advisory group and (iv) the inquiry team.

Seminar Attendees

Seminar attendees were those who signed up for the seminars and attended them either in person on Zoom or watched the video recordings at a time that was convenient to them. As Table 2 indicates, the seminar series attracted a wide audience from across the University. Data shown are the total number of attendees (111) who attended the seminars. Attendees were mostly from the Graduate School of Education (GSE [54]), of whom 29 were faculty, 25 postgraduate students, 3 administrative staff and 2 associates. This can be explained by the fact that the audience for the seminars was the GSE until January 2021, when the series was opened up to the whole university.

There were 46 attendees from across the rest of the university. Of the 6 colleges in the University of Exeter, two were not represented at any of the seminars - the Business School and the College of Engineering, Mathematics and Physical Sciences. We also had engagement from 10 associate attendees (those who are associated with the University of Exeter through their membership in research centres/networks) and 11 guests (those who are from other universities in the UK and internationally who were personally invited to attend). With most attendees working from home due to the COVID pandemic, giving the seminars online via Zoom enabled more to join in and contribute to the sessions than might have been the case if the seminars were face to face. We also recorded all the seminars (see the Section 3.3 for detailed ethical consideration) and uploaded each of these, soon after each seminar was completed, on YouTube for asynchronous viewing.

Table 2

Characteristics of Seminar Attendees

Characteristics of seminar attendees	
Faculty and Administrative Staff	62
Postgraduate Students	28
Associate members	10
Guests (other UK Universities)	11
Total	111
UExeter faculty, administrative staff and postgraduates: breakdown by department	
College of Social Sciences and International Studies	
Graduate School of Education	54
Law School	3
Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies	2
College of Humanities	
Classics and Ancient History	2
Drama	2
English	3
College of Life and Environmental Sciences	
Biosciences	1
Geography	2
Psychology	3
The College of Medicine & Health	
UEMS Education	2
College Operations	1
Campus Infrastructure & Operational Support	
Commercial Residential & Campus Services	1
Strategic Delivery Unit	
Digital Learning (Enhance) Team	2
Emeritus Professor	1
Innovation, Impact & Business	
Impact & Partnership Development	1
Human Resources	
Organisational Development	1
Education & Student Support	
Education Services (School Partnerships)	3
Teaching Quality Assurance & Enhancement	2
Student Wellbeing & Welfare	2
Student Employability & Academic Success	2
Subtotal	90
Associates and guests	21
Total	111

Inquiry Participants

Participants were those who gave their informed consent to take part in the inquiry project. Of the 111 seminar participants, 26 gave their consent to participate, representing 23.4% of the attendees. The characteristics of inquiry participants is shown in Table 3. Due to the small sample, we have not provided biographical information about the participants because this would identify who they are. Ensuring participants anonymity and protecting them from harm were key ethical considerations as discussed in the following section.

Table 3

Characteristics of Inquiry Participants

Role	
Faculty	8
Postgraduate student	8
Associate	3
Lifeworlds partner	2
Inquiry team	5
Department	
College of Social Sciences and International Studies	
Graduate School of Education	13
Law	1
College of Life & Environmental Science	1
Psychology	
College of Medicine & Health	1
Medicine	1
Humanities	1
Education and student support	1
College operations	2
Lifeworlds	5
Inquiry Team	
Total	26

3.3 Ethics

> Our relationships with the participants or communities with whom we work should be valued more highly than the academic gaze, as these relationships will likely remain long after the study is completed. Viewing participants as ends in themselves, rather than means to our academic ends, requires filtering our ethics of data interpretation, analysis, and representation by being in community with the participants first. Honoring participants as the primary audience means … [making] room for such disagreements, hold[ing] safe space for the participants as they disagree, and document[ing] such disagreements without denigrating the participants. (Bhattacharya, 2018a, p. 25)

As participants in the inquiry ourselves, we were consciously entangled and often caught in the paradoxes that trouble western paradigms of research ethics and their demands for mastery (Hart et al., 2018). Navigating these ethical considerations is vital to the legitimacy of this work thus, with the collective research community (inquiry project team, Lifeworlds, advisory group), our attention to ethical relationality was ongoing throughout the project – we frequently engaged with the question of how to manage an 'ethics of care' which was reflective of, and responsive to, the de/colonising principles guiding the work. In this section we therefore give a detailed description of the context, the ethics protocols we were required to observe by our respective universities, and our interpretation and expansion of these.

The University of Exeter is a Russell Group research-intensive institution located in the mainly rural southwest of England. Figures provided in the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion annual report (Table 4) show that the numbers of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME[19]) staff employed is well below the national average of 20.5% (Table 5). We anticipated that these proportions would be reflected in those who attended the seminar series, as proved to be the case. Our project, therefore, was one of de/colonising the minds and ways of relating in the context of predominantly white academics who are working with predominantly white students (Table 4).

Table 4

University of Exeter Staff and Student Profiles by Ethnicity: 2017-2019

UExeter Staff Profile	2017	2018	2019
White	87.6%	87.3%	86.0%
Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic	7.5%	7.9%	8.0%
Unknown	4.9%	4.8%	6.0%

UExeter Student Profile	2017	2018	2019
White	75.0%	74.0%	76.0%
Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic	20.0%	21.0%	19.1%
Unknown	5.0%	5.0%	5.2%

Note. Adapted from Perka, L., Cowan, D., & Thomas, R. (2019). *Equality, diversity & inclusivity: Annual report to council, July 2019.* https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/humanresources/edi/documents/reportsanddata/annualreports/EDI_Annual_Report_v2.2_-_20190827.pdf

Table 5

UK/non-UK Staff in English Universities by Ethnicity

English HEIs Staff Profile	UK Nationals	Non-UK Nationals	Average
White	88.9%	70%	79.5%
Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic	11.1%	30%	20.5%

[19] BAME is a contested term (Bunglawala, 2019), however, we use it here because it is the one used in the UK when reporting statistical differences according to ethnicity within the population.

Note. Adapted from Advance-He. (2019). *Equality in higher education: Staff statistical report 2019.* https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/advance-he/AdvanceHE_EqHE_Staff_Stats_Report_%202019_1569507134.pdf

In navigating our institutional ethics requirements, we considered the nature of the context we were working in, as described above, and how we might embody an ethics of care in our relationships with seminar attendees and those participating in the inquiry in ways that acknowledged their differing experiences. Firstly, we considered the fundamental harms present within the context of a colonial and colonising space, where counter narratives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), life histories, lived experiences and subaltern ways of knowing and being are fraught with danger, violence, and traumas. Secondly, we were cognisant of the care required to manage the white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011) which some may display when engaging with the critical element of the seminars, causing further harm to minoritised and marginalised people attending the seminars. Engaging with care is important at any time, but more so within the current context of the impact of Covid-19 on the institutional experience, and the 'hostile environment' prevalent within the United Kingdom educational sector and settings (see Sections 1.1-1.3). It was necessary to be respectful and empathetic when different groups entered the space of our project; indeed, people un/consciously bring their intersectional experiences (see Crenshaw, 1989) and thus interact with each other and the material differently within the boundaries of that space. We therefore considered the intergenerational histories and cultures of those who have long struggled with the violences of colonialism, coloniality, institutional and cultural discrimination. The use of hospitable and invitational approaches (Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2020) as part of our ethics of care was therefore vital.

3.3.1 Gaining Ethics Approval for a Project Conducted Within an International Partnership

An important and intentional part of the ethical design of any project is to consider how to navigate, or more importantly mitigate, the ethical procedures which are required in higher education institutions. Ethical approval to conduct an inquiry into participants' learning from the seminar series was granted by the University of Exeter on October 8th, 2020 (Ref S2021-002), and by the University of Regina on December 7th, 2020 (Ref REB 2020-173).

Although the project was conducted in the UK, it was part of an ongoing research partnership between the University of Regina, Canada, and the University of Exeter, UK. Both universities supported the project with internal funding; the seminars were led by Professor Fatmakhanu (fatima) Pirbhai-Illich and Dr Fran Martin; and the inquiry was undertaken by an international team of investigators (see Section 3.1). For these reasons we had to gain ethical approval from both universities, and we noted differences in the processes that we itemise here, after which we offer some thoughts about why these differences might exist.

- At the University of Exeter each college/faculty has a research ethics committee; there is also a university-wide research committee. The Graduate School of Education (GSE) is located within the college/faculty of Social Science and International Studies (SSIS) and has its own ethics committee. All those applying for ethical approval must read the British Educational Research Association (2018) guidance document. The dates of research committee meetings at which ethics applications are considered are circulated a year in advance; however, in

cases that are time sensitive, the chair of the committee can consider an application between these dates.

- The GSE ethics application was submitted to the GSE committee on October 1st, 2020. It was reviewed by the chair of the committee, and the SSIS research ethics officer, who is also a member of the university-wide research ethics and governance team. On October 5th, we received a query from the SSIS research ethics officer about the implications of applying to research ethics boards in two countries. Following our response, approval was granted on October 8th, 2020. The whole process took a week.
- At the University of Regina, there is a university-wide Research Ethics Board (REB) that is responsible for reviewing all research involving human subjects. All applicants are expected to refer to the University of Regina's guidance notes (University of Regina, 2021), and all researchers are also required to successfully complete the Canadian Tri-Council Tutorial Program: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics[20] (Tri-Council Policy Statement [TCPS] 2: Course on Research Ethics [CORE]). The dates of REB committee meetings are available on request. It is not possible to consider applications between meetings.
- The University of Regina ethics application was submitted to the REB for consideration in October. On November 20th we received communication from the REB asking us to address 14 queries about the content of the application. Following our responses to these queries, approval was granted on December 7th, 2020. The whole process took 6 weeks.

In the completion of the university ethics approval forms we found that as we responded to items on the University of Regina's form, this caused us to review what we had included on the University of Exeter's form. It seemed to us that the University of Regina and Canadian Tri-council processes required deeper thought about the possibility of causing harm, and about protecting the principles of confidentiality and anonymity, especially when conducting an inquiry entirely online. A possible explanation for this is that there is a significant difference between the two countries and their approach to redress the harms of colonialism and its legacy – the colonial world system.

As a settler colonial nation, Canada has been going through the process of acknowledging and addressing the legacy of colonial violence on people of Indigenous descent, most recently through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada ([TRC] 2015), the findings of which have direct implications for education and its role as a mechanism of coloniality (see Section 2.1). As a colonizing nation, the UK has not had to confront its past in the same way, in part due to the persistent belief evident in a recent poll showing that "A third of the population believes the British Empire left its former colonies 'better off' … reigniting questions over how Britain educates citizens about its colonial past, and the slavery, mass tortures and massacres that underlined it" (Gregory, 2020, para. 3). Santos (2007) argues that it is the nature of colonial cultures to be unconscious of their coloniality, precisely because they embody them as their norm. To use David Wallace's (2005) metaphor, colonial cultures are fish, swimming in water (immersed in the colonial world system) but unaware of what water (coloniality) is or that it is the norm of their existence. For those who embody coloniality to become consciously aware of this norm, they have to experience a different norm, and this is more than a matter of raising awareness, it is a critical process of 'conscientization' (Freire, 1970) involving both hyper self-reflection *and* action. Hyper self-reflection is aimed at identifying and understanding *one's own complicity* in the root causes of oppression, and then considering how to divest oneself of this in order to begin to act differently.

[20] https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/education_tutorial-didacticiel.html A certificate is generated on successful completion of the 8 module, online tutorial.

Returning to the differences between the University of Exeter and University of Regina application forms and processes, we noted that while there were many similarities between the guidance documents, the University of Regina and Canadian Tri-Council course caused us to reflect more deeply about issues of power, inequity, possible harm to the participants, the effects of conducting an inquiry online, and the type of consent that might be required dependent on the community participating in the inquiry. The University of Regina processes also required us to specifically consider how these issues might affect racialised and other minoritized communities with regards to their historic relations as colonised subjects for whom research has and continues to cause harm (Smith, 2012).

3.3.2 Enacting an Ethics of Care During the Project

As already mentioned, in a project about de/colonising educational relationships, it was crucial to develop trusting relationships with the people who attended the seminars and with those who consented to participate in the inquiry. During the development of the project, we had hoped that it would be possible to have a blended approach with some online and some face-to-face sessions. However, the constraints placed by COVID-19 meant that all lectures and activities had to be provided online. This presented significant challenges to the relational aspect of the project, one of the effects of which was that in the first three months we found we had little knowledge of who (in terms of their socio-historical, geo-political and cultural backgrounds) we were preparing the seminars for. We also found that in the first few months very few seminar participants had agreed to give their consent to participating in the inquiry project. We developed the following strategies to address these issues:

- From the 4th seminar up to the end of the series, we extended the seminar time from one hour to one hour and a half. The additional half hour was provided as a space where, as leaders of the seminars, we had no agenda other than to hear what people who stayed on wanted to talk about. We found this was a popular addition and around 8-10 people stayed on each time. This dialogic approach was much closer to what we had initially envisaged and gave us far more insight into who our attendees were, the lenses they brought to the seminars, and how and why they were engaging with the seminars. As a result, we were able to develop a deeper relationship with some of the seminar participants.
- We invited all members of the De/colonising Education Microsoft TEAM (the virtual space created for seminar attendees to access materials and interact with each other) to complete a mid-series evaluation to help inform how we proceeded with the second half of the seminar series. 10 of the 70+ members chose to do this.
- The PI and Co-I contacted each person who had attended more than one seminar by email, with a personal invitation to have a conversation with us (see Appendix A). This was done in order to build deeper relationships and to address any questions or concerns there might be regarding the seminar series to date and regarding what giving consent to participating in the inquiry might involve. Following this personal approach, we were able to meet our minimum target of 20 participants.
- When we invited participants to have conversations with us towards the end of the seminar series, we were aware that we were disadvantaging those who had attended the seminars but were not participating in the inquiry. We therefore also sent an invitation to all regular attendees at the seminars to invite them to have a conversation with us, ensuring them that the

conversation would not be recorded or used in the inquiry. Two people took us up on this offer.

3.4 Methods of Inquiry

For racialised peoples across the globe, research is a dirty word due to its inextricable entanglement with European imperialism and colonialism (Smith, 2012). The vocabulary of western, scientific research is therefore problematic; terms such as hypothesis, data, participant, sampling, interview, classification, analysis, objectivity, reliability, and generalisation are not neutral. For the colonised, these terms highlight the harms that they have been associated with when used in service of colonialism. In an attempt to de-link ourselves from this issue, we operated "from a place of humility, not from a place of entitlement" and thought about people not as "data repositories from whom [we were] going to extract the data" but as people who were generously giving of what they were willing to share (Bhattacharya, 2021, personal communication). We positioned ourselves as learners and aimed to suspend our will to know by building "relationships without any transactional expectation, just building relationships for the sake of building relationships" (Bhattacharya, 2021, personal communication). Rather than 'collecting data', our orientation to selecting and developing our methods of inquiry were therefore guided by the following principles:

- To avoid an 'extractive' approach that may leave participants feeling dispossessed of their own knowledges
- To breakdown the binary distinctions between investigator - participant, coloniser - colonised, subject - object
- To critically reflect on how we thought about knowledge creation, its collaborative processes, who has ownership of the knowledge created, and our ethical responsibilities to those who shared their knowledge with us during and after the project.
- To share our knowledges and vulnerabilities, including being open about issues of the 'messiness of research' and the aporias we were experiencing in trying to de/colonise our praxis as 'researchers'
- To be attentive to power differentials in all elements of the inquiry process from gaining consent to co-creating knowledge, the processes of analysis and the sharing of findings
- Where possible and appropriate, to collaborate with the advisory group, Lifeworlds and the participants on the dissemination of findings e.g., through writing papers, and on the legacy of the inquiry in terms of its wider and longer-term impact

The methods we used and developed, and the rationales for our choices, are outlined below.

3.4.1 Quantitative Methods

Quantitative methods (111 seminar participants)
1. Microsoft Teams analytics: Numbers of people who joined the GSE Decolonising Education TEAM
2. Zoom analytics: Numbers of people registering for and attending seminars 1-9
3. YouTube analytics: Numbers of views of video recordings for seminars 1-6 on (seminars 7-9 were interactive and not suitable for asynchronous viewing)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire seminar series took place virtually using the Zoom video conferencing platform. The Zoom seminar sessions were video recorded for participants who could

not attend in real time to engage with the seminars asynchronously. At the beginning of each session, permission was sought for the video recording, on the understanding that recordings would be edited to remove any sections in which attendees were visible so that only the presentation part of the seminar would be made public on YouTube.

The seminar series was advertised through university networks, and invitations to register for each seminar were sent two to three weeks in advance. Following registration, a zoom link was automatically generated and sent to the registrant by email. Zoom analytics showed us how many people had registered, who they were, and how many of those registered were able to attend the seminar in person. This information enabled us to gauge the level of interest in the series, as well as for each individual seminar, and to identify how many were attending multiple seminars and thus engaging more deeply.

Edited versions of seminars 1-6 were placed on YouTube[21] from 14 December 2021 onwards, as they became available. Seminars 7-9 were not put on YouTube because they were highly interactive, and it was impossible to keep the anonymity of those who attended these sessions (see Section 2.3 for further detail of the content of each seminar). YouTube analytics[22] were recorded at the beginning of August 2021, showing us how many views there had been for each seminar at that moment in time. This information enabled us to gauge the level of asynchronous engagement in the seminars.

3.4.2 Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods (26 inquiry participants)
1. Mid seminar series evaluations using set questions (x10)
2. Video-recordings and transcripts of post seminar discussions for seminars 4-9 (x6)
3. Video-recordings and transcripts of planning and reflection meetings with Lifeworlds for seminars 1-8 (x8)
4. Video-recordings and transcripts of conversations with participants (x13)
5. Video recordings and transcripts of end of project focus group conversations (x2)

Mid seminar Series Evaluations

In January 2021, between seminars 4 and 5, we invited all members of the De/colonising Education Microsoft Team space to complete an evaluation form (Appendix B). Respondents were asked which seminars they had attended and/or viewed on YouTube. They then had six open-ended questions to respond to that did not limit how much they might write. The evaluation forms were completed anonymously, and questions were designed to provide us with feedback on whether the seminars were meeting expectations, the elements they had found most useful, how they were finding the balance of presentation, activity and discussion used, and what they hoped to gain from the remainder of the series.

[21] See De/colonising educational relationships in teacher education - YouTube
[22] During 2020-2022, the videos were placed on a YouTube channel created specifically for the seminar series. The videos have now been further edited and are available at the link above, along with videos of seminars given at a weekend retreat at the University of Regina.

Post-Seminar Discussions

As discussed in 3.3.2 above, due to the pandemic it was difficult, at first, to develop relationships with those attending the seminars. In face-to-face situations there would have been opportunities for informal interactions before and after the seminars, as well as during the planned activities. In each of the seminars, in addition to the presentations, we used a variety of virtual instruments such as Microsoft form, MentiMeter (virtual polling software), and Padlet (virtual bulletin), as well as breakout rooms for small group discussions. However, these approaches were more facilitative of engagement with the seminar content than developing relationships with us as seminar leaders. For these reasons, from seminar 4 onwards, we remained in the zoom space for half an hour at the end of each session for an informal chat with those who were able to stay with us. The post-seminar discussions were recorded and transcribed, but we only analysed the contributions of those who had given their consent to participate in the inquiry.

Conversations

Understanding that the knowledge shared with us by our participants was gifted to us, we were very mindful of not conducting western, extractive style ‘interviews’ with pre-set questions. Instead, we invited the participants to have extended conversations with us in pairs or singly depending on their preference and availability (Appendix A). As part of our ethical relationality, and with the purpose of creating an atmosphere that addressed some of the ‘internet mediated’ (Marlow & Allen, 2022) difficulties of online investigations, our email invitations included the phrase,

> *To enable a more inviting, hospitable, relational atmosphere we are scheduling to meet with two people at a time. If we had been able to do this face to face, we would have invited you to have a drink and a snack with us - but as we are not able to do so, please do bring a drink and snack of your choosing to the Zoom call if you would like to! We will be doing the same.*

Eleven participants agreed to take part, and nine conversations took place between seminars 7 and 8 in May and June 2021. Our Lifeworlds partners also had a conversation with us in July 2021. Each conversation was scheduled for an hour, but the actual length was guided by how the conversation unfolded and the time constraints that might be on the participants. Conversations therefore lasted between 50 - 105 minutes.

This personal approach was valued by the participants, as was the completely open-ended nature of them. One participant, a doctoral student of colour, replied saying,

> *Thank you so much for your email and for your invitation. I would be more than happy to have this research conversation with you. Since I have entered the world of academia, you were the first one who approached me using the word 'conversation' than 'interview', and reading it made me feel differently (in a positive way) unlike interviews though I got used to them now. It is interesting how the choice of words can have a significant impact on someone's attitude.*

Framing our discussions as conversations allowed for rich discussions that were wide-ranging. Participants talked about the seminars, but also about their personal and professional life experiences. The conversations were dialogic as we also shared of ourselves and our personal and professional experiences, making ourselves vulnerable in ways that are usually excluded from

western qualitative methods. Western approaches include unstructured interviews, but these are almost always driven by a research agenda with specific prompts that the researcher hopes to cover. In our case, we regarded the discussions as critical, relational conversations in which we all learn with and from each other, and as such we considered our approach in keeping with our de/colonising position.

Focus Group Conversations

All participants who had engaged in a conversation with us were also invited to take part in a focus group discussion at the end of the seminar series. Two focus groups conversations took place on July 14 and 16, 2021, with between 3 and 4 participants attending each one. A further conversation with one participant took place the following week as they were unable to attend either of the focus group dates. As with the previous conversations, we did not have a specific agenda other than to have a conversation about what participants had gained from engaging in the seminar series as a whole, and anything else that they chose to bring to the space. The focus groups also brought an added dimension to the dialogue because there were more voices present and thus the potential for exploration of difference in the inter-cultural spaces was amplified. An example of how we framed the start of each conversation is given below (as we did not use a script, this varied from one conversation to another):

> *Thank you for agreeing to have this conversation with us. We truly believe that relationality enables learning and so relationships are not just for the sake of learning but also building community. You know, that intercultural relational piece is really important to start to learn about each other, with each other and alongside each other, so that we're all sort of disentangling and entangling ourselves in different ways - so thank you very much for taking the time to chat with us. We're trying to be mindful of how a de/colonial project would take place and one way is to disrupt the normal interview approach, so we genuinely want to get to know you and learn about you, and you to learn about us. We're hoping to just have a conversation over a cup of tea and something to eat.*

3.4.3 Analysis of Transcripts

We used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse the planning meetings and inquiry conversations. CDA is an approach that attempts to connect the micro-structure of language to the macro-structure of society and focuses on the role of discourse in the (re)production of oppressive systems that lead to social inequality (Van Dijk, 2015). CDA analyses texts at word, phrase, and sentence levels to make explicit the ways in which people position themselves and others, and the subjectivities or socio-philosophical orientations that are revealed as a result. In connecting the analysis of the micro-structure of language to the macro-structure of society it becomes possible to identify how participants, including the inquiry team, reproduce, resist, and challenge relations of power and dominance in society. In particular, we paid attention to the discourses inherent in the hierarchies of power shown in Figure 1, Section 1, and the relationships between how discourses operated individually, institutionally, societally, and politically (Van Djik, 2015). The steps we took in our analyses were as follows:

1. General, holistic reading of the texts to familiarise ourselves with the content and begin to build codes. Video and Sound files were also listened to, to ensure familiarity with the data.
2. A second, detailed reading of each text and colour coding according to codes identified in 1.

3. A third, detailed reading of each text, thinking carefully about the inquiry questions; does anything else need to be highlighted? Who (identity) is it that is speaking? Who is silenced? What was silenced? Begin to identify overarching themes.
4. Look at the language in the text. Read through for how people have positioned themselves and how they have positioned others. Consider the use of personal pronouns, whether the speaker uses the third person to create a distance between themselves and what is being discussed, or whether they use the first person and implicate themselves in the discourse.
5. A final, critical reading of the texts, making connections between the micro-structures of language and the macro-structures of the socio-cultural, historical, and geo-political contexts and discourses of society.

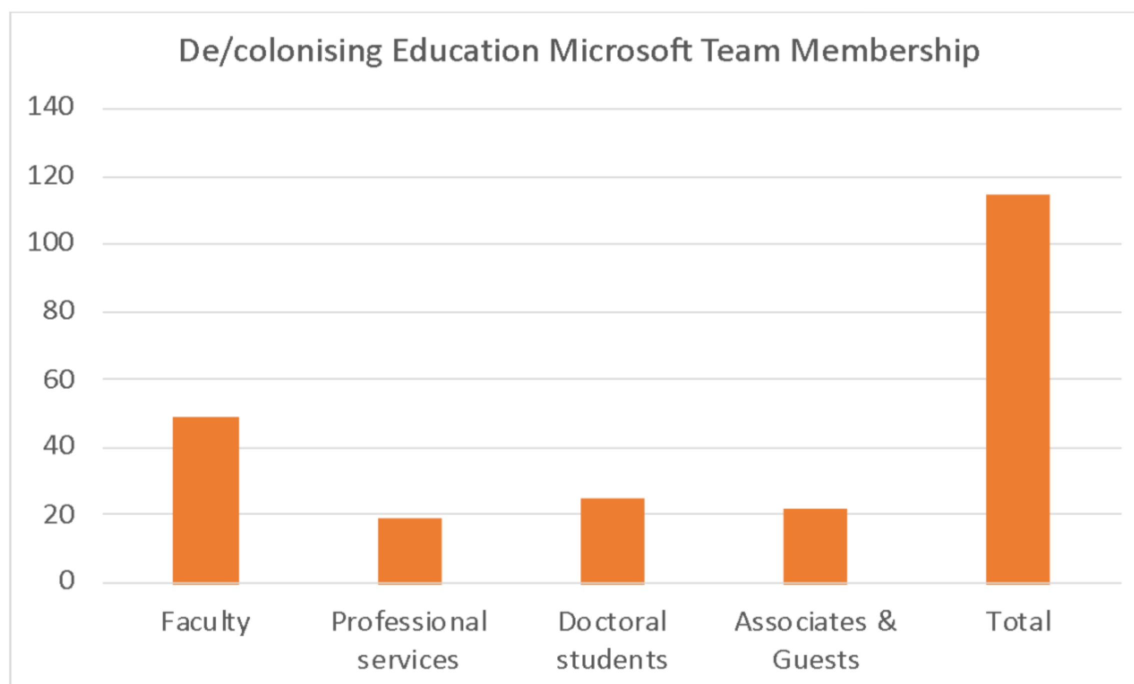
4. Findings

4.1 Quantitative Findings

The three methods of gathering information about engagement in the seminar series are presented in Tables 6, 7 and 8. The de/colonising education Microsoft Team[23] space was created for two purposes: to share information (readings, video-recordings of the lectures) and to create a space where people could use the chat function for dialogue if they wished to. Anyone who expressed an interest in the seminars was invited to join. The number of members using the space grew over time and was at 115 as recorded in May 2021. Table 6 shows the breakdown of members according to their role in the university and the number who were either associate or guest members.

Table 6

Breakdown of Members of De/colonising Education Microsoft Team Space (May 2021)



[23] For the purposes of this section, subsequently we refer to this as 'the Team'

Although our initial intention was that this might be a space for people to enter into dialogue about their responses and reflections to the seminars, this did not happen. There are a number of possible reasons for why this might have been the case.

- Not all members of the Team attended the seminars, and YouTube analytics did not enable us to identify who was viewing the recordings
- Due to the pandemic, all university activities went online. Faculty, administrators, and students were members of multiple Teams and could not engage equally with all of them. Online fatigue was therefore a major factor (for us as seminar leaders as well)

Table 7

Engagement in the Seminars: Registered, Attended and YouTube Views

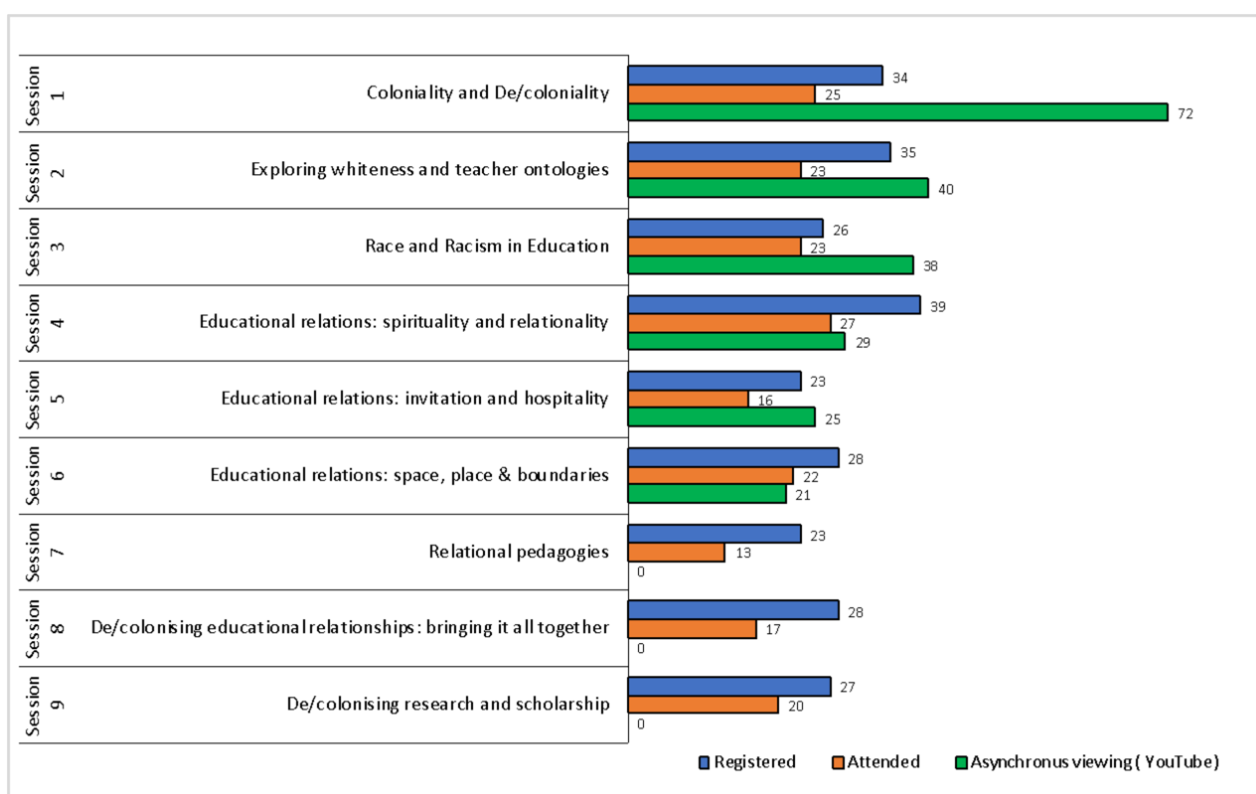
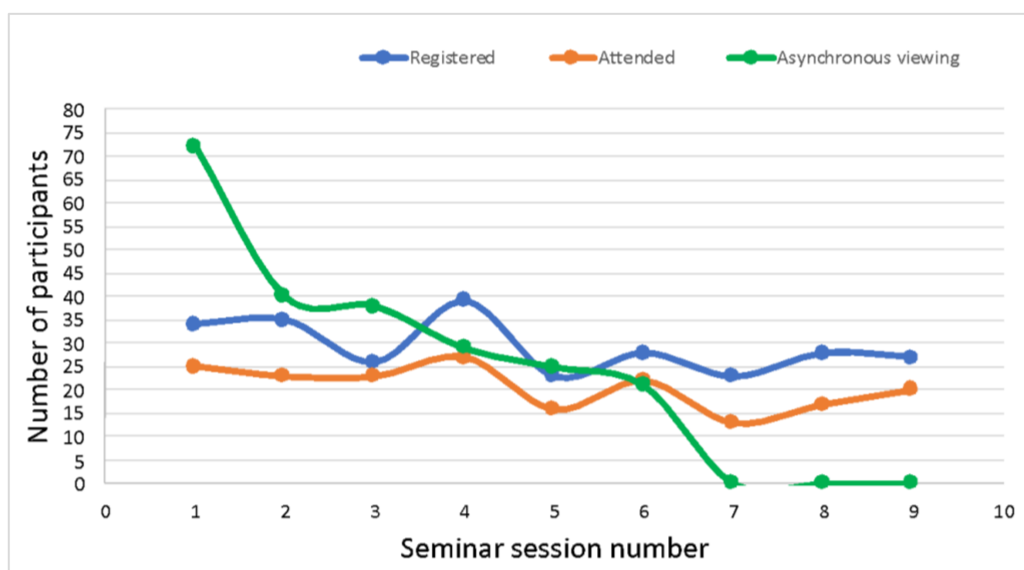


Table 8

Changing Levels of Engagement in the Seminars



Tables 7 and 8 show the numbers of people who registered for each seminar, who attended each seminar in person, and who viewed the video-recordings of the seminars. The numbers who viewed the YouTube video recordings of seminars 1-6 were recorded at the beginning of August 2021. As mentioned in Section 3.4.1, seminars 7-9 were interactive and for ethical reasons these were not made available on YouTube, hence a zero figure for asynchronous viewing is recorded for seminars 7-9.

As described in Table 1, Section 2.3, the seminars were structured in three parts: an introduction to the issues (seminars 1-3), our imaginary for de/colonising educational relations (seminars 4-6), and exploring the implications for teaching, research and scholarship (seminars 7-9). If YouTube views and attendance of seminars are combined, the seminars introducing key issues were the most popular. Attendance of the live seminars fluctuated from month to month, but overall, there was a decline in engagement over time - fewer were registering each month and fewer still attending. There are a number of reasons for why this might have been the case.

- When the initial seminars took place there was a great deal of energy behind the idea of decolonisation in education, following the murder of George Floyd and the social and political ramifications (see Figure 2: Timeline of events).
- The first three seminars took place at the beginning of the academic year and online fatigue had not yet set in; in January-February 2021, England went into its third lockdown and the challenges of combining online working with family commitments began to take its toll which could explain the drop in numbers from February onwards.
- In January-February 2021, England also had the highest numbers of COVID cases and people being hospitalised, causing a great deal of additional stress.
- In the Spring of 2021, the UK government brought out a number of policies that directly impacted the field of education and created a more hostile (and therefore risky) environment to engage in decolonising activities.

- It is usual for there to be some attrition in attendance for a seminar series over time.
- In the proliferation of online seminars on decolonising education, we were unusual in asking people to make a commitment to a series of nine seminars. Most online offers were for 'one-off' events, with the exception (to our knowledge) of a MOOC offered by the University of Bristol.[24]

However, although numbers are an initial sign of interest, due to the critical, relational nature of our project, we were more interested in the depth of engagement and the opportunity to build relationships and to learn from the different perspectives and onto-epistemological positions of those we engaged with.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

As a reminder, the questions guiding our inquiry were:

1. What do faculty, administrative staff and doctoral students learn about themselves and their praxis from a seminar series on de/colonising educational relationships in higher education?
2. What do faculty, administrative staff and doctoral students learn about coloniality and de/coloniality from the seminar series?
3. What might be the possibilities for change to their own teaching and assessment?
4. What spaces for de/colonising educational relationships within their programmes might be created as a result?

Part of our own learning, as the seminar series progressed, was a realisation that questions 3 and 4 were very ambitious. For us to expect answers to questions 3 and 4 in such a short space of time, when many of the participants were engaging with de/colonising educational relationships for the first time, would be to expect them to identify quick solutions to what is a hugely complex issue, and this in itself would be a colonial way of thinking. We therefore focus on questions 1 and 2, and relate our analyses of what participants spoke about to the hierarchies of power represented in Figure 1. This is because, in our conversations with them, participants frequently referred to the macro (governmental, societal) and meso (institutional) level systems and structures that influenced the extent to which, despite their desire to do so, they were able to take their learning from the seminars and begin to apply it to their specific practice contexts. We also relate participants' learning to those aspects of the seminar series - content *and* process - that they mentioned as being supportive of such learning.

As part of our ethical responsibility to protect the identity of the participants, where we have directly quoted from their conversations with us, we have indicated whether this was a post-seminar discussion (PSD), a research conversation (RC) or a focus group (FG). The post-seminar discussions are numbered 4-9. The conversations and focus groups are numbered (RC1-13; FG 1-3) and the page number of the transcript is given (RC1, p.12). We have also used gender neutral terms they/theirs and identify our inquiry participants as X1, X2 etc. to protect their identity.

[24] This is a four-week course that is fully online with no 'live' sessions. All presentations are recorded with supporting online readings https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/decolonising-education-from-theory-to-practice

4.2.1 Government Control

> *I just see all the time how people are battled backwards, every time they try to move forward. It's almost endemic in the system.* (X1, FG 2, p. 23)

In their conversations with us, the participants gave many examples of the ways in which they felt spaces for decolonizing work were being closed down through increasing levels of government control. Bencz & Carter (2011) argue that education has increasingly been subject to neo-liberal (Luka et al., 2015) and neo-conservative forces which respectively seek "to make the world safe for global capitalism" (McLaren, 2000, p. 196) and to "preserve traditional forms of privilege and marginalise authentic democratic and social justice agendas" (Bencz & Carter, 2011, p. 651) that threaten those privileges. The participants consistently referred to how, since the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, UK legislation outlined in Section 1.1 has sought to constrain and silence actions positioned by the government as anti-conservative and anti-capitalist.

For example, one participant discussed government interventions in Initial Teacher Education programmes:

> I*t's just so typical of what seems to be happening is that people are saying, we need to do things differently, but then they're creating a systemized, almost dictatorial way of, 'and this is how you will all do it. And everyone will do it the same' (with emphasis). Which is, of course, just more of the colonial than it has been for decades*. (X2, RC 12, p. 7)

Another participant related the UK government's actions to Britain's role as a colonising nation:

> *the UK is the king or the queen of that appropriation and silencing. Just so good at it. ... And it's practised, not just in the UK, but in those nation states all around the world, over centuries. ... the British, they're the best administrators. I always describe them, the greatest administrators and part of that administration is silencing*. (X3, RC 10, p. 7)

In this extract, the participant was referring to the Sewell report (CREDR, 2021) that denied the continuing existence of institutional racism. Yet another participant spoke about how,

> *now that the government has said that you cannot in schools criticize capitalism, ... for me [this]was the clincher of the precipice we're on. Because unless you can be free to constructively criticize and discuss major ways in which we operate, then there is no hope*. (X1, RC 6, p. 12)

We view these examples as the government using its power to close down any resistance to the discourse of British exceptionalism (Fletcher, 2020) that is promoted for the UK as a nation, including in education. The use of legislation as a coercive measure to control effectively, silences any form of dissent and increases the risks involved in taking part in decolonising activities, which was also expressed by a participant who stated,

> *I wonder how we will manage to continue to have these sorts of conversations when we're all told that we must not promote anti-capitalist materials in schools? It's not okay. ... Unlike some of you, I've got quite a few years ahead of me of work [laughs] and I can't adhere to*

that kind of rule. ... So, what will happen? Will we, will all of us get kicked out and replaced with robots who will follow those rules? (X4, RC 6, p. 12)

The question of whether it is possible to subvert government policy from within, and the risks involved, was mentioned by another participant when speaking about their country of birth in Africa. They spoke of how,

from the 1920s, they had been shipping out a lot of Africans to go into America, and into the UK to get educated to come back as resources, ... because now we could speak the language, the English language, and we can also speak the language of the Africans then it became, you know, a way of destabilising. So, a lot of the records show how people in government, and even in institutions, like missionary institutions, were subverting very, very slowly through the writings, even through music. (X5, RC 13, p. 22)

Although the participant is speaking about a different time and place, their thoughts caused us to reflect on the conditions which lead people to put themselves at risk. In this example, the Africans didn't have anything to lose as, under colonisation, they had already lost almost everything. They were also fighting for political independence and the right of self-governance. In England, the focus of our seminars was on decolonising the mind (Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, 1986) and, along with it, raising an awareness of how it might be possible to develop other forms of educational and research relationships that are not coercive or oppressive. As members of the academy, our participants are implicated in the system, albeit possibly also critical of it. In the increasingly hostile environment created by government policy, they may be fearful of changes that resist the target driven, outcome-oriented system that they are currently measured by. And for scholars of colour, the risks of such resistance will be greater in the short-term.

However, as the participant observed, even when independence was achieved, decolonisation of the mind did not automatically follow. 'New' governments continued to colonise the local populations and the colonial structures and ways of being inherited by these countries continue to be perpetuated.

After the British left, they left exactly the systems as they were, and handed them directly to the Africans, totally unchanged. So, the only thing that changed was the skin tone of the people who went in every other thing remained exactly the same, the hierarchies, the oppressive ways, the access was limited to certain people. ... so, what has happened is that our own people are our colonisers. And I don't know whether that is better or worse, because these are the people you trust. It's not being oppressed as you know, something from outside. (X5, RC 1, p. 7)

One participant also reflected on how politicians might not want to engage in decolonisation:

because we work on such a short time span as far as politics is concerned. And what we're really talking about are longer periods of time in order to try and embed some sort of change. And I think that's the paradoxical situation. (X1, FG 2, p. 24)

In other words, decolonisation is antithetical to a system that is driven by short-term targets and measurable outcomes, because it is a long-term, arguably generational venture. For example, in our own work we do not set out goals and objectives because we do not have a clear end point – it is an emergent process towards something that is currently unimaginable (Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017a).

4.2.2 Institutional Control

> *You feel like you're putting a welcome mat in front of a locked door.* (X9, FG 1, p. 10)

There were many examples, in our conversations with participants, of the paradoxical and entangled nature of efforts to decolonise within the university. On the one hand, there was recognition of institutional support for decolonisation; on the other there was scepticism about the extent to which this support was genuine or performative.

> *There's a lot of noise around it* [decolonisation] *at the moment ... that noise, in some ways, provides an obvious opportunity. But it also makes elements of it more challenging, because you've got to cut through all that noise and the sort of superficial element that I think a lot of people are responding to at the moment, and then go, 'We need to do something about this' and it's not because they are always from an authentic ... [or] a deeply felt sense that 'No, we really should do something about this, this has awoken something in us.'* (X2, RC 12, p. 4)

The same participant reflected that there was a desire to act and to be seen to act, and that educators, *"spot an opportunity and jump in with both feet, sometimes not even having checked what they bring in ... and start, you know, waving their arms around and saying, 'We've got the answers.'"*

However, another participant, who has a university-wide role, spoke about how they were identified by their senior managers as someone who could lead on a decolonising initiative. They had been approached by senior managers to explain why the institutional approach to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) appeared not to be having the intended outcomes. They stated, *"tell us what you're doing so we can see what's going wrong, so we can fix it"* (X6, RC 5, p. 1). Feeling on the defensive, they had pointed out what was currently being done and "*so suddenly, like here, I was this de facto institutional expert to support our EDI work, which was really weird, because, you know, I don't research it"* (X6, RC 5, p. 1).

There are a number of things to unpack here, the first of which is, what do people in a lead role in a university do when they want to undertake decolonial work but do not have the expertise or experience to understand what is entailed? This participant was expected to identify a problem and fix it, whether they had the relevant knowledge or not. This pressure to act can be interpreted as the colonial desire to look for "un-complicated solutions (offering feel-good, quick fixes that do not address the root cause of the problem)" (Andreotti et al., 2018, p. 15). In addition, as we argued in Section 1.2, positioning decolonisation as an aspect of EDI locates it within a colonial frame and thus any strategic actions from such a position are unlikely to succeed. There is an implied assumption here that the senior managers view decolonisation as an EDI issue and although the participant acknowledged that the term inclusion is *"fraught with meaning"* they went on to say, *"but let's just use that."* We interpret this as a further paradox, or aporia, in which the language of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is the universally accepted language used in the UK and Canada for matters of educational social justice, yet it is a language and conceptual framing that is born out of coloniality. To be intelligible it may be necessary to continue using a language that is familiar, but in doing so it enfolds decolonisation back into the system. It raises the question of how do you speak about something when you don't yet have a language to express things differently? It also reflects why we have been inspired by Bhattacharya (2018a; 2018b) to frame our project as de/colonising,

with the forward slash between 'de' and 'colonising', because there is no pure decolonising space at this juncture - we are all implicated in one way or another.

The same participant spoke about the multiple initiatives at the university as *"a scattergun approach and to some extent, you know, you need a bit of scattergun … but at some point, it's just really inefficient*" (X6, RC 5, p. 7). This was seen in the range of projects taking place and the fact that project leaders were not necessarily aware of other projects, or able to liaise with each other. Examples of projects included: some disciplines, where there was a focus on decolonising the curriculum; the establishment of the Exeter Decolonising Network (a university-wide network of about 150 students, administrative staff, and faculty members); and the internal funding of projects such as the Decolonising Exeter – Teaching Toolkit[25], Working Towards De/colonising Educational Relationships (this project), and a student union survey linked to decolonising the curriculum[26]. During the year in which we were running the seminar series, there was a move made to provide some overarching framework and coherence to these activities through the appointment of an Associate Academic Dean for Students, but again this was positioned as a role pertaining to Racial Equality and Inclusion, rather than explicitly about decolonisation.

The initiatives to decolonise the curriculum and the Exeter Decolonising Network (EDN) were both mentioned by participants. One participant, a member of the EDN, described it as a "*community of people. So, you've got different ways of knowing and being in that space whereas in the other groups* [names two faculty networks], *in particular, they are much more institutionalised, they are much more inward looking*." This participant was contrasting the EDN, which currently sits outside formal institutional structures, with networks that are embedded in the institutional system, the latter of which they described as having "*more gatekeepers … people who are, whose role it is to literally maintain some of those institutional structures and barriers* [to decolonisation]" (X3, RC 10, p. 3). However, another participant, also a member of the EDN, spoke about how initially, when it was being formed in 2020,

> *I absolutely loved it. … because we had small groups. And we were able to talk, right, and we were able to reflect and to start to think about change, … and this year,* [2021] *it became more, you know, audiences and listening to amazing speakers, but the dynamics changed completely.*

For them, the opportunity for ongoing dialogue in small groups was essential, and something they found when engaging in our seminar series which they described as,

> *the only platform where we had that opportunity to be in a small group of people and think together and talk about, like decolonization together. For me, decolonization is like, it's the centre, right? It's the heart of everything. So having this group is really crucial. And without it, it really is a problem.* (X7, RC 4, p. 5)

This suggests another paradox that, when there is an attempt to build community outside university structures, the members of that community also have to meet university expectations in terms of productivity and outcomes resulting in some of the activity being co-opted by these institutional demands. Providing a number of single session seminars with well-known scholars of colour working in decolonial and anti-racist fields is more measurable than holding space for monthly

[25] See https://www.exeter.ac.uk/research/socialmobility/projects/ for further details
[26] See https://www.thesu.org.uk/voice/campaigns/decolonisingthecurriculum/ for further details

dialogue, learning and action. It is perhaps the difference between an epistemological approach to educational change, where people "learn from alternative ways of knowing in search of models and roadmaps that can lead toward a different future" and an ontological approach which is a "messy, collective process of learning/unlearning that may lead to viable but as-yet-undefined and unimaginable futures" (Andreotti et al., 2018, p. 32). It is also an example of coloniality's entanglement in capitalism and the "naturalisation of the state of racialised servitude" (Vergès, 2021, p. 33), where racialised educators, administrators and students are engaged to serve the needs of the system. As Ahmed (2017) states,

> A meeting point is often a labouring point. If you are not white, not male, not straight, not cis, not able-bodied you are more likely to end up on diversity and equality committees. … [and doing] this kind of work. (p. 135)

Several participants were aware of the coloniality of their discipline. "*My kind of training and background is in classical music, which has a kind of, quite inglorious history in terms of kind of colonial practices*" (X8, RC 2, p. 2), and that there were huge challenges in trying to find spaces to move away from Euro-western disciplinary knowledge as the 'gold standard'. For example, a participant talked about their role in museum education where they were working towards widening the communities who engaged in the museum and bringing in different voices.

> *But if you have security mak*[ing] *our visitors feel uncomfortable, if you have curators that write labels that are exclusionary, if you have an events team that tries to ban children from going into a certain gallery, it's not one institution of 5000 people all pulling in the same direction, we've got different tensions. ... someone used this great phrase once and I've used it repeatedly, 'You feel like you're putting a welcome mat in front of a locked door.'* (X9, FG 1, p. 10)

Another participant had created a staff-student working group to consider the implications of decolonisation in their discipline and they were very aware that this would be a long-term process, and that *"it's clear to me if we would come and say 'No, okay, that's the change you need to make' that would be blocked, blocked from so many like colleagues, but also school and college and everyone"* (X7, RC 4, p. 15). Both participants raise the issue of the ways in which "senior or tenured faculty members play an important "gatekeeping" role" (Ng & Litzenberg, 2019, p. 3) in preserving the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge, including whose and what forms of knowledges are legitimised and whose are excluded (see also Section 4.2.6).

One participant spoke about how, as a teacher in the school system, they worked in schools where:

> *the staff were all white, the kids were mostly white, 99%, white, English, Christian. And I always had an inkling that the students* [who] *weren't of that demographic, were desperately underrepresented within ... the power structure within the school and with the education system itself. ...* [The underrepresented students] *were struggling to make friendship groups, especially in the secondary school, that was very much a them and us situation*. (X10, RC 9, p. 4)

When they tried to challenge this, they found "*trying to tackle the powers that be really difficult, really, really hard and trying to change minds and change opinions and change policy"* (X10, RC 9, p. 4). This speaks to the increasingly hostile environment that has been created by government

legislation in recent years. It is felt particularly keenly by educators in university Initial Teacher Education programmes across England, whose licence to train teachers is dependent on periodic inspections by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). The Ofsted brief for any inspection is, in turn, determined by government legislation that prescribes much of the content of ITE programmes. For example, the Core Content Framework (CCF) for ITE[27] was made statutory for all ITE providers from September 2020; two participants, who were engaged to co-lead a relational and values-based module each year for ITE students, were told,

> *This might be the last year we do it because of this new core framework, because we can't find a way in the framework that will justify engaging with an organisation like yours that challenges the conventions of the industrial education system*. (X11, RC 12, p. 7)

The purpose of the CCF is to mandate the curriculum for Initial Teacher Education in England and is positioned by the Department for Education as "representing the best evidence for what teacher training programmes should contain [although] the claim that the CCF is based on the 'best evidence' is highly contestable" (Brooks, 2021, para. 2). The fact that "The Ofsted ITE Inspection Framework emphasises fidelity to the CCF" (Brooks, 2021, para. 2) indicates the extent to which the government uses mechanisms to both control what and whose knowledges are legitimised in teacher education, and to ensure compliance. The consequences of non-compliance would be that an ITE programme would be given notice to improve (become compliant) or be closed. This regime of accountability and fear funnels down from government to institutions, and from institutions to classrooms. The ways in which educators, administrators and students spoke about how they negotiate the tensions between fear and resistance is the focus of the next section.

4.2.3 Fear and Resistance

> *One of the things that [educators] who are completely invested in their own ways of creating curriculum, teaching, researching that have been very, very successful for them ... is that they fear that what decolonization is asking them to do is to replace what they know with what they don't know.* (FG 2, p. 20)

Fear seems to be a natural emotional response or reaction to the unknown, to completing difficult tasks and to personal threats. In institutions of higher education, we argue that the commodification of academic work as 'outputs' through the metrics that place an economic value on these outputs, has created an environment of fear[28]. This can take the form of a fear of reprisal when scholars do not reach their expected targets, or when they wish to engage in scholarly activity that might reduce their 'productivity.' Fear of reprisal may be both a learned behaviour that has resulted from a scholar receiving direct punitive measures for perceived non-conformity, non-compliance, and non-performance, and a behaviour learned from observing and speaking to those who have been subjected to punitive measures. We found several incidences in our conversations that indicated a fear of change, a fear of needing to unlearn in order to learn, a fear of the unknown, and a fear of challenging the status quo. Any of these fears, in combination or on their own, can lead to resistance to change. They can also lead to acting too quickly, due to the fear of not being seen to act. One participant indicated that many teachers, academics, and institutions are responding to the call to

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[27] See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-core-content-framework

[28] See Zachary Stein's work on *The Commodification of Education* http://www.zakstein.org/invited-editorial-the-education-commodity-proposition/

decolonize their ways of being, doing, viewing of the world, and that they are *"wanting to be seen to be doing something about this"* (X2, RC 12, p. 4) however there is *"a lot of surface level engagement ... going on in my experience at the moment"* (X2, RC 12, p. 4). Another participant, in the same conversation, used the term "*spectrum*" (X12, RC 12, p. 4) to indicate differing levels of engagement where these levels were dependent on educators' understanding, and sometimes fear, of "*how much they* (teachers, academics, and institutions) *may need to look at themselves*" (X12, RC 12, p. 4).

Sometimes fear has the effect of causing immobility or inaction. Two participants spoke of the enormity of what is involved, and that the process of de/colonising can be "*daunting and overwhelming*" (X9, FG 1, p. 10) and "*I do find sometimes I'm very discouraged because of the enormity of what really would need to be done*" (X6, FG 2, p. 18). We also understand that in these times job security is tenuous, and thus many will continue to be co-opted by the system and maintain the status quo. For others there might be a flight response. One participant indicated that academics were leaving institutions of higher education due to the constraints placed on them by the government and institutions (see Sections 4.2.1-4.2.2). However, one of the effects of leaving rather than engaging in challenging discussions and resisting the constraints, is that it may mitigate against developing a critical mass of like-minded academics who can effectively do this work. When one participant tried to suggest different ways of doing education and questioned systemic injustices at their school, they were *"…escorted out of the room and told that, actually I'm making waves and I shouldn't do this when the system is as the system is"* (X10, FG 1, p. 14).

The fear of governments, academia, and the population at large of racialized groups moving into white spaces was also mentioned by one participant, in the context of what it might mean, for example, for "*a young black man from Africa entering a university in white Iowa*" (X13, RC 3, p. 3). 'White' fear is characteristic of a colonial mindset that interprets the inclusion of racialized groups as a form of take-over and/or loss of English culture. This fear was discussed in relation to decolonising the curriculum at the University of Cambridge in 2017. Zachary Myers, a journalist and an immigrant to England, queried why there was such a fear, resistance and backlash from the right-wing press around decolonising the curriculum. Myers likened these reactions of terror and anger to that exhibited around debates over immigration and the fear of reverse colonisation, arguing that it was not so much about the fear of losing English authors in the syllabus as about the potential loss and/or the watering down of a national English identity, the "Englishness" that is embodied within these texts. He writes,

> This attitude seems to be exactly the problem with English society today. Basing 'Englishness' on the exclusion of foreign people and foreign cultures is ignoring that 'Englishness' has never been contained to England. If anything, for centuries, 'Englishness' has been synonymous with cultural imperialism … People around the world have been forced to fit the mould of the English culture, and it's been the spoils of the plunder of these foreign lands that have contributed to what we consider to be 'English' today … if a national culture is for everyone, is it really for anyone? (Myers, 2017, para 5).

Similarly, in our own discussions around the colonial project, identity formation, and marginalised groups in the UK, one participant revealed that the

> *spaces where you can engage in those kinds of discourses that relate to education are so limited. But you're not going to see them generally in mainstream spaces, and the levels of*

protection that have to be put in place to ensure that the participants of that conversation are, quote unquote safe, are quite significant. Because you know that you're in a hostile environment, you know that your very words are fraught with absolute danger. (X3, RC 10, p. 14)

They go on to reveal that telling the truth about the atrocities of colonisation put them at risk within the institutional setting: at risk of being perceived as being radical, rocking the boat, and at risk of being labelled incompetent and challenging and thus not a proper fit for positions in the institution. For scholars of colour in academia who do engage in decolonial, anti-racist and anti-oppressive work, negotiating the feeling of risk and danger is coupled with having to constantly shift their identities and use of language to make spaces safe for the white students and educators. This was felt, by one participant, as an aporia in which they not only had to deal with safeguarding their *own* identity from those (i.e. of Euro-western descent) who might harm them, but also felt the responsibility of safeguarding this same group from the feelings of guilt, sadness, confusion, or fear that often occur when faced with their own whiteness[29].

In this regard we found that there was an unequal emotional load carried by the participants in relation to the content presented[30]. Scholars identifying as being from the global north seemed to be able to discuss and intellectualise the violence of colonisation in many ways as innocent bystanders (RC 5, RC 8), whereas those who identified as being born in countries during the time of colonial expansion, exploitation, and the postcolonial aftermath, responded to the content at both an intellectual *and* a visceral, embodied level (RC 1, RC 3, RC 10). Matias (2016) argues that "the burden of racial justice [falls] on the shoulders of people of colour" (p. 172); to this we can add that the emotional burden of *decolonising* work also falls disproportionately on the shoulders of people of colour. The huge discrepancy in the levels of knowledge between these two groups clearly demonstrated how the erasure of historical and contemporary knowledge around the colonial project and its aftermath influences their identities, and the ways in which they (differently) engage in decolonial work.

4.2.4 Identity and Belonging

> *It's great to love, but we all want to be loved back, just a little bit.* (X3, RC 10, p. 11)
>
> *People like me, who have only spoken in English, … have come from a past in which* [my own] *language has been taken away through slavery, and I have no access to that language.* (X13, RC 3, p.1)

It is impossible to engage in any de/colonising project without considering the ways in which individual and group identities have been affected by colonisation, and continue to be affected by its legacy, coloniality. Identities are also bound up with a sense of self and belonging and, as we outlined in Section 1, coloniality categorises and divides individuals and groups and then places them in hierarchies of value, with a white, male, Euro-Western, Christian, heterosexual, cisgendered

[29] 'Given the social construction of race, "whiteness is not merely about skin colour. There are other markers that racialize people located on the 'wrong side' of colonial difference (e.g., accent, language, demeanor);" Grosfoguel, 2002, p. 212).
[30] See, for example, The Many Layers of Invisible Labour Decolonising the Academy – TWAILR

identity being seen as the superior norm against which all other aspects of identity are judged to be inferior. The categorisation of identities is part of the colonial desire to name the world, as an act of control and dominance.

> The European baptizing of the [American] continent drastically modified the heretofore history, plurality, and social, cultural, economic, spiritual, territorial, and existential foundation of these lands, making it—by naming it—a singular unit seen and defined from the European gaze. (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 22)

The act of naming is a colonial act of power - the power to possess by naming lands and peoples and thereby robbing those colonised of their power to name and identify themselves. Contemporary parallels can be seen in the classification and reclassification of identities that have been categorised as non-mainstream, for example, BME, BIPoC, LGBTQ+, SEND[31]. This power to name (and thereby possess and control) is also the power to Other (Said, 1985) - to identify as 'not' and to exclude from mainstream society; it is "a form of political cartography … that fixes the cultural image, subordinates differences, and radically destroys identities" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 22).

Identity and belonging is a central theme in our work and, inspired by Tuck & Yang's (2012) assertion that decolonisation is not a metaphor, we have drawn on our own lived experiences to explore how different identities and senses of belonging are related to the land (Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2021). This work has highlighted for us the importance of what Grosfoguel (2011) refers to as "the locus of enunciation, that is, the geo-political and body-political location of the subject that speaks" (p. 5). It is this contextualisation - the explicit surfacing of the influences on one's identity (and therefore subjectivities and positionalities) - that is a crucial part of de/colonising one's ways of being, doing, knowing and valuing and the relationships that stem from these.

One participant, for example, described how, as a racialised person born in the UK, they have had to live with the boundaries others have set for them. Thinking about the difference between the UK and Canada, they spoke about how the relationship between land and identity changed according to location because,

> *there's a different connection with land in Canada. Whereas this land is not mine [laughs] And even if I own the freehold, it's never gonna be mine ... [but] I was born here, so it should be mine. ... But it will never be mine. I mean, there's a nuance in the relationship, which is about ... belonging and claiming so almost the tension is we want to belong, but at the same time, we kind of want to be claimed as British folk or British folk of colour. And I'm not claimed and I don't feel belonged (sic)'... it's great to love, but we all want to be loved back, just a little bit.* (X3, RC 10, p. 7 & 9)

In this they were making the important point that, although they were born in the UK and described their national identity as British, and although they claimed Britishness, they did not feel that white, mainstream Britain claimed them back. Similarly, in a settler colonial country such as Canada, people racialised as black, brown or Indigenous can claim citizenship but they do not feel claimed by the dominant (white settler) version of what it means to be Canadian. In addition, Canadian citizens racialised as black and brown are caught in a space where they do not feel claimed by either the

[31] The names of the categories have changed over time. Here we select a few that are in current use in the UK. Black and Minority Ethnic; Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer +; Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Indigenous (because they are settler) or the white settler (because they are racialised as black or brown) populations. The damaging, essentialist nature of categorisation is addressed by Anzaldúa who argues that, “what we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 41), something that we discuss further in Section 4.2.6.

To further complicate matters, “*the word Indigenous is highly problematic within the UK context, because that speaks to a white English nationalism”* (X3, RC 10, p. 5). In this the participant speaks to the appropriation of the term Indigenous as used in settler colonial contexts, and its use to maintain the superiority and privilege of whiteness in the UK. For example, over the last decade or so, far right organisations in Europe have claimed Indigeneity as part of their attempts to limit immigration and to claim Indigenous rights as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples[32]. In doing this they are claiming their rights as ‘first peoples’, while ignoring the legal and political contexts, in which Indigenous is,

> understood as a complex term that is conditional on current circumstance, not as an absolute and unchanging descriptor for a state of being. It specifically recognises that a people or tribe has become marginalised within the dominant society thanks to a history of conquest, colonisation, and/or absorption into a nation state. (MacKay & Stirrup, 2010).

The same participant spoke about layers of belonging. For example, they felt that even *“if I'm in an academic space, … if I’ve got all of the institutional markers that offer me that belonging, including language*” (RC 10, p. 10) they were still marginalised. Another participant also discussed how it took them some while to find a space for their identity in academia. They are a racialised, white-passing academic who, in their home country before entering the academy, *“was an activist, like with all of my cells, like all the cells of my body, … with a huge focus on violence against women”* (X7, RC 4, p. 4). This work “*really kind of formed me*.” Over time they had the desire to do a PhD and with their family they moved to the UK to study and then became an academic at Exeter. However,

> *it took me many years actually to even connect to academia. And I think the reason was that it felt so isolated to me. And so like, sometimes even irrelevant to what's going on in the world, right? … it honestly took me many years to realise that I can see myself as an academic, and I actually have something to bring. And the reason I'm saying all that is that basically, that's really leading me to why decolonising, like anything that has to do with the colonisation in terms of content, in terms of connecting our work to society, that's for me, like homing, like creating a home for myself, like seeing, okay, this is something now, now I get it. Now, I see that this is relevant*. (X7, RC 4, p. 4-5)

The connection between identity and belonging was also explored by a participant racialised as brown who talked about what it was like to live in a country that had colonised their own country,

> *we* [their family] *are here in a country…* [who] *were colonisers once, and we have got a home here, we bought this house to house, this is our property, but you know, we always have this, like, maybe when we, when we become old, we'll go back to our home country, you know, that kind of feeling [laughs] it's like, we have this home, we have this property, but we say that we will go back to our home country, which means that although this is ours, but*

[32] https://www.ohchr.org/en/indigenous-peoples/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples

> *something that we cannot accept as ours, we always have that feeling then we have something which is really ours, and which is not here.* (X14, RC 11, p. 2)

Later in the conversation they said, *"I'm not fighting for any identity here in this country. If I feel that I'm so much struggling, I'll just go back. I have a place to go back* [to]" (X14, RC 11, p. 14).

This participant raises our awareness that, even though they have lived and worked in the UK for over ten years, their sense of belonging in the UK is transient. During our conversation they described their relation to the UK as instrumental to their careers, and that their identity continued to be linked to their heritage and with the knowledge that they could always return to their home country if they wished to. This is in contrast with those who have immigrated to another country as refugees or forced migrants. However, the participant said that it may be different for their children, both of whom were born in the UK. They spoke about how they

> *try to raise* [their children] *in an* [name of country of birth] *way anyway. But yeah, there is a slight problem with the language because, well, ... my children, they have only learned English. So I'm trying a little bit now, I thought I made a very big mistake, maybe I should have just spoken only my language. But this is one thing that I'm inspired from this seminar now.* (X14, RC 11, p. 15)

The issue of language was raised by a participant racialised as black. They spoke about how the medium for instruction in most education systems in places that were colonised by the British is English. They described this as:

> *another form of violence, to have to use a language that is not your own. ... people like me, who have only spoken in English, and have come from a past in which* [my heritage] *language has been taken away through slavery, and I have no access to that language. ... what, what language do we use in order to, to... it's not just process it's* [the violences of colonisation] *what language do we use to, to explain things to ourselves?*" (X13, RC 3, p. 1)

This caused a paradox in their current situation, working in Africa, where it is:

> *unusual to be monolingual. And the only way you are monolingual, is if you have been influenced by colonisation. That's the only way you can be monolingual in Africa. But it's, it's something that I'd like to explore more and would like to understand from you, your thoughts about language and decolonization? ... How do we explain our experiences using another language that ... has been imposed on us?"* (X13, RC 3, p. 2)

The entanglement of coloniality in the construction of identities was the focus for discussion in our conversation with two participants, both of whom had begun to think differently about their identities as a result of engaging in the seminars. One, with African heritage, said,

> *it's been a really big challenge for me. And then I had to question how colonised I have been, because I speak the language, because even the music that I taught in* [home country] *is western classical music. We did have a section that was African music, but it was less so and I used to wonder why. But now it's become even more pronounced as to why that was the case. So, it was a very disturbing journey. To think that I have been colonised [laughs] and having to ask myself am I also colonising my students by just passing that on? And it was a very disturbing thought to think that I was also a coloniser.* (X5, RC 1, p. 2)

The other participant, with white settler heritage, picked this up saying,

> *I'm white, my family's Scottish and English going back a few generations and* [I was] *raised with a quite a stark awareness of colonisation you know and also you are part of, you are on the coloniser side of the fence when you're white, you know, which isn't a very comfortable space, but it's something that is I've always been aware of to various degrees.* (X9, RC 1, p.3)

They expanded on this saying how for their grandparents, as with many others who immigrated from Europe, coloniality was embodied in the ways in which they tried to re-create 'home' to maintain their British identity,

> "[my grandparents] *talked about England as home - you know they've never been or visited. We used to have big roasts at Christmas, and it was the middle of summer and so everyone's sitting there in summer dresses sweating having this winter meal because it's Britain. ... and it's the whole thing is just like you can, try to ignore the geography, ... ignore the people who are there, and sort of force this worldview.* (X9, RC1, p. 3)

Taken together, the participants' narratives above are a counter-narrative to the universalising, homogenising and essentializing discourses of coloniality. The complexities and intersectionalities evident in the participants' articulations of their identities and relationships with coloniality problematize the use of terms such as BAME, BME, BIPoC, immigrant, and refugee, as a means of categorising populations. As Taylor (2021) argues, "whiteness is the unmarked centre" (p. 55) of such categories, which are created to define racialised people *in relation to* the imagined (white, Euro-western) citizen of the nation state and thus to mark them as 'Other' (Davis, 2017). The political purpose for categorising identities is ostensibly to facilitate the allocation of public funding to provide public services. However, when these terms are used uncritically in, for example, education contexts, they gain currency and can reinforce the discriminatory structures that they seek to destabilise.

For example, the University of Exeter has a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) staff and student network[33] and the University of Regina has a Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPoC) Mentorship Program[34]. In both cases the groups are linked to meeting the institutional goals for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, thus enfolding them back into the colonial structures that created them as Other in the first place. The need to belong, or what Alexander (2005) refers to as a yearning to belong, is not met by how others define a community, nor is it "to be confined to membership or citizenship in community, political movement, Nation, group, or belonging to a family. … The source of that yearning is the deep knowing that we are in fact interdependent" (Alexander, 2005, p. 282). The need to belong is therefore a yearning for community in which the community itself creates its identity through becoming "fluent in one another's histories," unlearning the identities that have been ascribed in relation to whiteness and cultivating "a way of knowing in which we direct our social, cultural, psychic, and spiritually marked attention on each other" (Alexander, 2005, p. 282). This was eloquently articulated by a participant as:

> *a community space where everyone's kind of got this shared, generations of shared experience, which are being relied upon, that becomes the dominant way of speaking. So,*

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[33] https://www.exeter.ac.uk/departments/inclusion/groups/networks/bmenetwork/

[34] https://www.uregina.ca/education/Students/For_Grads/BIPOC-Mentorship.html

you're not relying on those ways you've been taught, you're relying on the ways that you are. So that, and so if I think, think about that, and again I'm only basing it on my experiences, I guess, working with black educators in the UK, in particular, periodically, when we are together, that happens. And it's the most magical thing. (X3, RC 10, p. 13).

4.2.5 Privilege and Whiteness

> *It really strikes me that when you're doing this in Britain, the Indigenous population's white, and is sort of the side of empire that was going out and doing it, and, you know, for a Canadian population, that's, that's reversed.* (FG 1, p. 3).

In this section we focus on the ways in which the participants spoke about (or not) their relationship with whiteness. The second of the seminars in the series focused on the relationship between coloniality and whiteness - a relationship that we have explored in previous publications (Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017a; Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2020). We take inspiration from Sara Ahmed (2007) who "consider[s] what 'whiteness' does without assuming whiteness as an ontological given, but as that which has been received, or become given, over time" (p. 150). Our purpose was to name whiteness as a core element of coloniality because, "Naming 'whiteness' displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance" (Wekker, 2016, p.24). Wekker argues that in her country of The Netherlands, there is a reluctance among white people to explicitly talk about race and that it has largely been replaced by ethnicity in public discourse. This mirrors our experience of "the realm of ethnicity being white is passed off as a natural, invisible category" and that and the term ethnic, as in "ethnic cuisine, ethnic music, is everything except white. There is thus a systematic asymmetry in the way we understand these dimensions, where the more powerful member of a binary pair - masculinity, whiteness - is consistently bracketed and is thereby invisibilized and installed as the norm" (Wekker, 2016, p. 23).

This was evident in our conversations where participants racialised as white rarely referred to their whiteness or the privileges that came with it. If whiteness was mentioned by participants with a white, British heritage, it was in the context of discussing the concept in general rather than their own whiteness; whereas if it was mentioned by those with a white settler heritage it was more likely to be as an aspect of their identity. As one white settler participant observed,

> *I'm white, my family's Scottish and English going back a few generations and you're raised with quite a stark awareness of colonisation … and also you are part of, you are on the coloniser side of the fence when you're white, you know, which isn't a very comfortable space, but it's something that is I've always been aware of to various degrees. And it's fascinating to live in the UK which I've done for 20 years. And that understanding of colonisation if you haven't actually been out there on the receiving end of it in one way or the other, to not actually know what that is and what that does and the impact that it has on countries.* (X9, RC 1, p. 3)

Often, when analysing the transcripts of our conversations with participants we noticed that while white privilege was recognised, some of the participants found the content in the seminar series difficult to hear and were somewhat resistant to issues around their own complicity and white privilege. They engaged in the series as innocent bystanders, not willing to own their whiteness and complicity in perpetuating the status quo. Some attended the seminar series simply to hear what we had to say, others distanced themselves from their whiteness. In one instance, a participant spoke

about how, "*I mean, like the Welsh consider themselves colonised. And the Irish considered themselves colonised. So, you know, … all of these countries considered themselves very colonised by the English*" (X15, RC 8, p. 18). We read this as an example of the conflation of whiteness with skin colour. As a concept, whiteness is that aspect of coloniality - the current colonial world system - that divides the world along racialised lines. People with white skin have, over time, been subject to colonisation and the political definition of who is "white" has changed over time. For example, in the USA in the 20th century, the Irish, Italians, Greeks, Jews, and people from Eastern Europe were considered 'non-white.' As a result, they were subjugated and exploited by the dominant group. They gained 'white' privilege only when those in power expanded the definition of whiteness to include their ethnicity (Johnson, 2018). In other words, it is not simply a binary divide of white-black; coloniality also creates categories within categories, hierarchies within hierarchies, and since these are social constructions, the categories change over time. For example, a participant with African heritage discussed the privilege afforded them as someone undertaking their doctoral studies in the UK and whether they would return to their country of origin.

> *fatima: So one of the things you know, I also come from a country that was colonised. And so, each time, we got colonised part of our culture and practices, our ontologies and epistemologies changed and … when I think about being a decolonial scholar, I think about Algeria and the brain drain. And so, you know, young scholars coming to the west, getting educated in the West, staying in the West*
>
> *X16: Yeah*
>
> *fatima: And not going back to do the, to do that the hard work of decolonizing the mind… So, I wonder about how you feel about the brain drain? You know, how, whether the seminar series, or our conversations* [might] *make you think about whether you want to go back and work with the people there; whether you'd have more influence there? Or would you have more influence here in* [this] *context now? And whether* [is there a] *sense of being complicit, a sense of 'I want the benefits of being in the UK or in Canada'?*
>
> *X16: Yeah. Yeah and I…. 100%, and I relate 100% to what you just said, fatima, because I come from a similar background that had colonial history. But also I received my first education, but also my university education in [home country] first, and then I moved to the UK. And I could see the differences, the similarities, and this transition from Global South to Global North, and I can see the privilege that I had as a doctoral researcher here in the UK. So definitely that, that is something that I think about, and … in terms of being complicit being based in the Global North, but not doing the work in the Global South, it could come across as being critical, maybe. And it's something that I'm aware of - if I don't want to go back to [home country], does it mean the decolonial work that I'm doing has no value. Now, because of my complicitous (sic), because of me wanting to stay in the Global North and benefit from this privilege, and keep talking about it, in the Global North only and excluding Global South locations, geographies, and communities – is that re-inscribing colonial practice?*' (X16, RC 7, p. 6-7).

Based on the responses above to the questions that were posed during our conversation, we found that this participant was able to articulate the connections between power and privilege and questioned how they negotiate the paradox of being both a colonised subject and someone who, through their access to the privileges that their position in the UK brings, benefits from working on and writing about decolonising practices in higher education. This is another example of the legacy

of colonialism and how, at a structural level, economic interaction between the Global North and the Global South is "no more than a continuation of the Centre-Periphery relationship that existed during colonial times" (Amaizo, 2012, p. 117). Amaizo argues that the outcome of the application of Western economic development models to post-colonial nations - particularly in Africa - has been an acceleration of the drain of capital from Africa to the West, including 'human capital.'[35] Higher education in the Global North is complicit in this exploitative dependency relationship through its policies of Internationalisation which Munyonga (2020) argues is a mechanism for the West to maintain superiority in the knowledge economy. This brain drain robs countries in the Global South of their future, 'making economic growth and poverty alleviation an almost impossible task' (Omagu, 2012). Madan (2021) talks about the emotional toil of such decisions - the feelings of guilt for 'abandoning' one's country [and] benefitting from the oppression of one's own people. He argues that the phenomenon is cyclical in nature — more human and financial capital (e.g., through inflated university fees) put into the North only accelerates the North's advancement, giving more reason for people to emigrate there.

Two white-passing[36] participants referred to their ethnically mixed heritages and the ways in which they experienced that as, "*inhabiting an in-between space*" (X15, RC 8, p. 19), and feeling "*a real connection to some of those* [heritage culture] *things"* (X6, RC 5, p. 8). In both cases the participants were not denying their whiteness or the privileges that come with it, but subtly distancing themselves from the racism that is associated with whiteness, *"I recognise I'm white and have all the privilege of being white. But I don't feel entirely white, because there's that little hint of feeling that I don't quite connect with the culture around me"* (X6, RC 5, p. 8). These are perhaps examples of what Chandler-Ward (2019) describes,

> when white people want to prove they are 'one of the good ones', [they] often want to … distance themselves from other white people when those others say or do something racially problematic" such as "when they express a racist behaviour or belief. (para. 2)

This is perhaps an unconscious reflection that they are, in fact, judging others for things they know they have done themselves but may not want to acknowledge or confront.

This may be allied to what another participant said in relation to how people engaged differently with decolonising activities, and that "*some people believe they do need to do something until they are confronted with how much they may need to look at themselves*" (X12, RC 12, p. 4). This is an issue we have discussed before (Pirbhai-Illich et. al. 2017a), that viewing decolonisation as an aspect of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion retains the focus on the 'Other.' For us there is a need to turn the gaze 180 degrees towards unsettling whiteness in all its forms - liberal, conservative - as they are all implicated in ongoing colonial harms. In 1990, bell hooks argued that while "Whites are willing to analyse how Blacks are perceived by Whites, rarely are [they] attentive to how Blacks view Whites" (Hooks, 1990, p. 55). Our observation is that, even in the light of the Black Lives Matter movement, many whites continue to protect themselves from, and even legislate against, being attentive to how they are viewed by the Other. Therefore, educationally our approach to de/coloniality is one of critical, relational, interculturality that centres the "narratives of the marginalised, Indigenous, and people of colour" as an essential element in the "process of conscience and consciousness raising among white, mainstream populations" (Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017b, p. 237).

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[35] For an accessible explanation of how contemporary international economic relations maintain coloniality and global inequalities see [Colonial Legacy, Dependency & Brain Drain From The Global South - Colombo Telegraph]

[36] https://www.purewow.com/wellness/what-is-white-passing

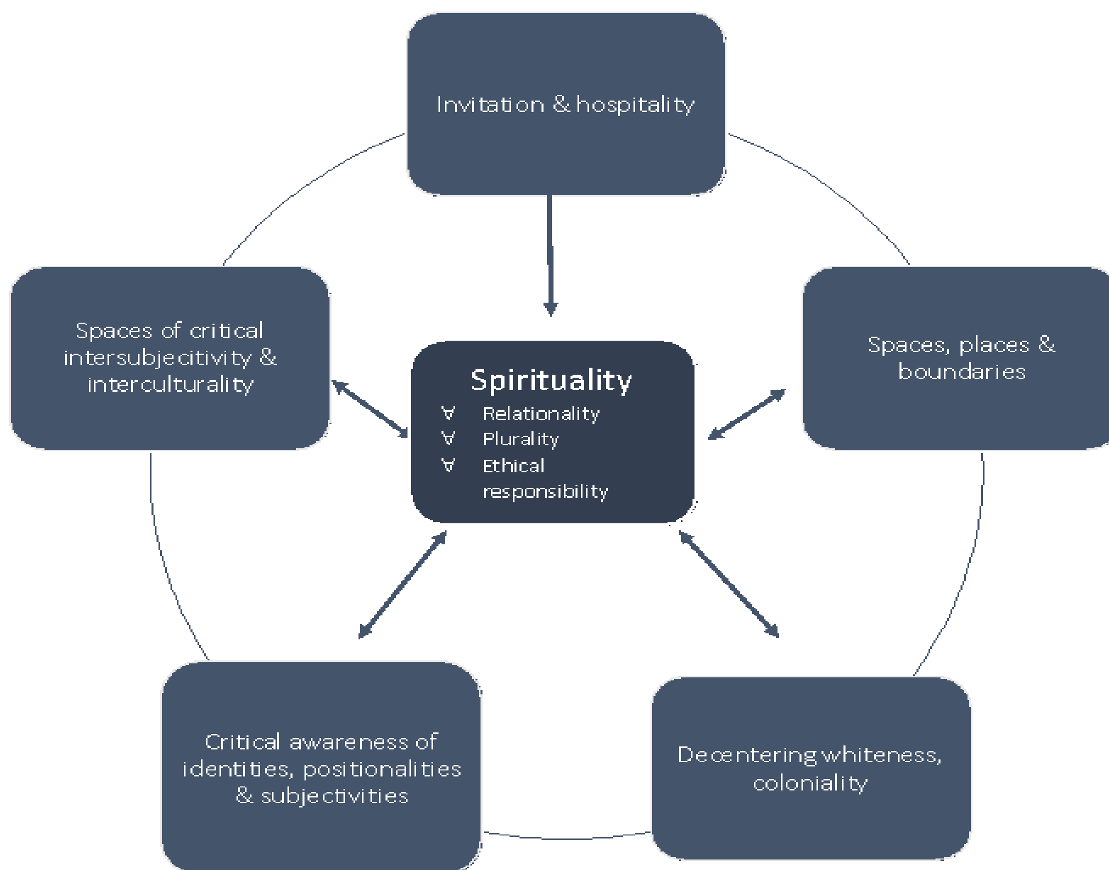
4.2.6 Spirituality and Relationality

> *... how do we encourage them to not see this* [the imaginary] *as a product, or as an intervention, or as a piece of training, but more as the start of a new way of thinking.* (X2, RC 12, p. 6)

In Sections 2 and 3 we have outlined the methodology we developed for the seminars and the inquiry into what was learnt from the seminars. Our methodology is based on our imaginary for de/colonising educational relationships in which spirituality and critical relationality are its centre (Figure 5).

Figure 5

An imaginary for De/Colonising Educational Relationships



In the seminar (see Seminar 4 - A spiritual dimension to de/colonising relationships in education [Exeter]) we describe how the centering of a spiritual dimension in our imaginary emerged from our personal experiences and our theorising from these everyday experiences (Appendix C). In this we were also inspired by the work of Anzaldúa (1999), Anzaldúa (2015), Bhattacharya (2020), and Buber (1923/1958). Our rationale for bringing a spiritual dimension into education is based on our experiences of the coloniality and neoliberalization of education, of its regimes of accountability, and of the forms of coercive and spiritually harmful relationships that such a system demands.

Coloniality is based on a logic of separation that, in education, has created fractured selves across the system. We believe that a spiritual, soulful dimension brings a healing element that is crucial to the processes of de/colonisation. In this, we understand spirituality as 'untethered', rather than 'tethered' to religion[37] (Flanagan et al., 2012). Including a spiritual dimension in education is not, for us, about spiritual *development,* which may be associated with linear stages of development, but rather about spiritual *growth*. As Judy Iseke (2013) says, "spirituality's strength as a life-force" which aids the "decolonization of the mind in the school system" and "not attending to the spirit would make decolonizing work incomplete; through spirituality you can then be a subject of change rather than an object of change" (p. 37).

For us, spirituality is embodied in the way that we ethically practise in our daily lives (personally and professionally), in our ways of thinking, viewing, and doing in the world. It is based on the fundamental principles that we're all interconnected, interrelated and interdependent; on a recognition of something that is more than us, that is other than us, and that connects all of us, including rocks and streams, flora and fauna, and the more than human and human beings. Spirituality infuses our practices of generosity, humility and trust, and our understanding of the pluriversality of knowledges both in and beyond the material world. It is a holistic understanding of what it means to be generous of spirit, of intellect and knowledge, and of what it means to be both human and humane. It's about the mind, it's about the heart, it's about the body, it's about ways of being, it's about what and how and who we value. It's about how we relate to each other, the material world, and the spirit world. We therefore intentionally worked to develop spaces that were non-judgemental, non-coercive and inviting and hospitable to different ways of being; spaces in which participants could bring their authentic selves and feel safe enough to explore their entanglements with coloniality. In this regard building community, building spiritual relationships, 'being with' and 'learning with and alongside' the participants, was at the heart of our approach.

The harmful effects of coloniality and the marginalisation of spirituality in education was mentioned by several participants. One participant spoke about the fractured nature of his experience as a teacher in secondary schools where:

> *everything is so disparate, ... there's no interconnectedness at all between subjects, one subject doesn't really speak to the other one. And many of the teachers ... still have the old chalk and talk brigade, and they talk for an hour, expect the students to have learned something and dismiss them.* (X10, RC 9, p. 19)

Another participant spoke of the role of missionary schools in Africa, where education was a vehicle for converting their family to Christianity:

> *my father was educated in a missionary school. The schools that I went to were missionary schools. And it did produce inequalities. ... I was ... sometimes forced to actually participate in religious activities that I was not interested in. ... I was being required to do all the rituals that Catholics do, even though it has nothing to do with my faith or my religion*. (X5, PSD 4, p. 5)

[37] Flanagan et al., (2012) discuss "two types of spiritual education – that which is 'tethered' to a particular denomination or religion and that which is 'untethered'. The latter 'affirm[s] that spirituality is an intrinsic part of the human person" (p. 62-63).

In the context of higher education, a participant spoke about the marginalisation of spirituality in the academy, arguing that although it was considered, this was

> *definitely not on a, on a level playing field, that there's still the kind of hierarchy of, 'This is what's true and real'. And we will listen to people's voices, but lots of elements of spirituality and different ways of being and believing across the globe aren't really considered good enough or of equal standing.* (X4, RC 6, p. 7)

In these examples there is a marginalisation of forms of spirituality, whether "tethered or untethered" (Flanagan et al 2012, p. 62), that colonial projects have deemed unacceptable. During the period of colonisation, non-European, non-Christian spiritualities were positioned as "demonic," "heathen," and "uncivilised," while European, Christian spiritualities were positioned as "progressive" and "civilised" (Rhee & Subedi, 2014, p. 340). It is challenging to step outside those colonially normative ways of knowing and being, the legacy of which is expressed by the participants above. De Souza argues that "the lack of effective language in the Western world to capture this particular [spiritual] dimension of human experience and expression plays a significant role in creating obscurity rather than transparency" (de Souza, 2017, p. 2). This was evident for one participant for whom, "*the use of the word spirituality, taxes me on a whole number of levels*" (X1, RC6, p. 4) because in their experience it was often equated with religion, and *"I see lots of organised religion, in itself being colonial and colonising and having belief systems, which they want to impose upon other people"* (X1, RC 6, p. 8). They understood that we were not tethering spirituality to religion, but they wanted to check that their understanding of what we called spirituality accorded with their own view.

> *I can completely accord with your view of feeling at one with the world, the planet and everything that exists upon it, that connection, that transdisciplinarity of the world itself. ... So if spirituality is that which is beyond those things that we can understand, or ever hope to understand, that's fine, I just want people to be clear about their definitions so that I, we're not talking at cross purposes.* (X1, RC 6, p. 9).

We found this helpful because it made us think more clearly about what we mean and how we talk about it.

Another participant was struggling with the harmful effects of a Euro-western, colonial, fractured approach to their research, in which spiritual forms of relationality might be marginalised. In the post-seminar discussion of the seminar on de/colonising research and scholarship, led by Professor Bhattacharya, they asked,

> *Um, I'm just thinking about the concept of research in itself being a particular Western way of seeking knowledge ... And one of the questions that I found triggered my thinking is where, what if the people who you're researching do not want to be researched? Meaning that is not their way of knowing. So, I mean, I want to know, ... but it doesn't mean the people I'm wanting to know about want to be known. Or want to be known in that way. And how to negotiate that?* (X5, PSD 9, p. 6).

Their question, as a scholar of colour, in a UK university, conducting research in the Global South, indicates a growing awareness of their complicity in the harmful practices associated with Western research (Smith, 2012). In her response, Professor Bhattacharya[38] (2021) began by saying,

> I think research has to be done by invitation only, like you cannot enter the space, and start doing research and see people as data repositories and extract information from them, it has to by invitation only, you know, or you're already in a relationship with a group of people and you organically say, 'I would like to know,' and then they have a fully informed way of consenting to the work that you want to do, then that's okay, if you have already built up a relationship.

It is this form of spiritual and ethical relationality, that involves connecting with participants in the seminars and building community, that is central to our approach and seemed to resonate with many participants. *"That session continues to resonate with me. Very rarely do you see what appears to be relatively calm people going wild, with just after 45 minutes of content, literally, it affected their very foundations, that's a really powerful dialogue"* (X3, RC 10, p. 26). They predominantly describe their understandings of spirituality as being about interconnectedness, relationships and about how we come to understand ourselves and our relation with the world. For some this was "*tied with the natural world,*" being "*part of a bigger thing, ... part of a larger web of beings, all interconnected*" (X6, RC 5, p. 13). For others it was a necessary alternative to the colonial, rational mind, which they saw as having *"led to our dreadful catastrophe in terms of global climate change"* (X1, RC 6, p. 4). One participant was particularly drawn to the idea that spirituality is also "*about communication that transcends language and being with other people - having the space and readiness to be with other people*" and that they could relate that to classroom interactions because "*it's all about human interaction. That's how we learn ... it's how our self-esteem develops, it's about somebody having space in their mind for you ... that feeling itself is enough to create spirituality and relationships and connection*" (X4, RC 6, p. 3). Another participant related this to our inclusion of Martin Buber's 'I-It and I-Thou' (1923/1958) relations saying,

> *It's the thou in us right, rather than seeing ourselves as a form, as a rational mind, ... to recognise ourselves and from that recognition to recognise the other person ... when we actually realise that there is something deeper than that [one's individual circumstances], then we are also able to see that in the other*. (X7, RC 4, p. 15)

Another spoke of how, "*spirituality, relationality, positionality, porous boundaries are the things that I've been discussing a lot in my research and resonated a lot with the things that I'm saying*", even though *"I might have a label [Utu], which is totally different"* (X5, RC 13, p. 2). In another conversation, the same participant elaborated saying that,

> *my understanding is that interaction is what builds spirituality, it's not the fact that we are imposing one upon the other, it's the fact that we can bring it out from ourselves with all that we bring into that space.* (X5, PSD 4, p. 5)

However, building respectful, ethical, trusting, authentic, non-coercive relationships takes time. As one of our participants observed, *"I think that that's one of my takeaway observations, in terms of where this goes is the need for patience and the need for time"* (X2, RC 12, p. 6). They continued by reflecting on how de/colonising educational relationships is

[38] See Seminar 7 - Kakali Bhattacharya (Exeter)

not that simple. It's a slow process, it takes quite a while to unlearn everything that you bring to the situation before you can even begin to introduce new ideas and bring things in. ... and how do we give people that time? And how do we encourage them to not see this as a product, or as an intervention, or as a piece of training, but more as a um, the start of a new way of thinking. (X2, RC 12, p. 6)

This is reinforced by another participant who observed that,

> *so many seminars, even the ones we do with the university, are like one-off things ... And for something like decolonization, which is something to get your head around, I think maybe it's important that it's something to build up over time. You know, rather than having it sort of just about gaining a lot of knowledge in one go.* (X15, RC 8, p. 2)

The building of community, relating and interacting in spiritual and meaningful ways with those who attended the seminars, was particularly challenging when holding the seminars through the medium of Zoom. To this end we intentionally created de/colonial spaces by embodying a praxis centred on spirituality. If we hoped that participants felt able to bring their authentic selves to the spaces we created, we also had to be authentic with them, and we did so by explicitly sharing our own lived experiences, theorising from the everyday, and negotiating the third space (Bhabha, 1994) between our subject positions and their different loci of enunciation (Mignolo, 2007). Our aim was that, by being authentic and showing our vulnerabilities, we would create an invitational space where, after each seminar, anyone in the audience could engage in conversations with us about the seminar or any other matter related to decolonising higher education and educational relationships. Difficult conversations and discussions were engaged in and responded to in what fatima identifies as 'speaking with honey' for two reasons; one, to provide a space where instead of playing the blame game, she could use the space to gently inform and get the 'buy in' from the participants and second, to keep her safe from any direct confrontation.

Many participants referred to how our approach was different to what they usually experienced when attending seminars and lectures, and that the ways in which we made our processes visible, warts and all, was helpful.

> *I'm really interested in how the personal relationship between the two of you informs your approach ... I think I'm friendly in how I do my job, but there is a professional version of myself that I'm putting forward. ... I think there is a vulnerability to bringing yourselves to this project in the way you do by bringing your personal stories and how, when there are things that annoy you about each other, you talk about that too.* (X9, RC 1 p.1)

This was reinforced by another participant who said,

> *I'm always interested in the person as well as the academic, the person behind the academic. And often in academia, you cannot see that, you cannot glean that, you cannot touch that. And you both have allowed us even in this virtual space to see, to touch, to smell, to hear. To experience I guess is the word.* (X13, RC 3, p. 8-9)

The importance of trust and vulnerability when building relationships was noted by another participant, *"So we have to begin with trust, we have to begin with, you know, being able to share*

that little bit of ourselves with time. And some people are more natural about that" (X5, RC 1, p. 15).

Without trust, it would be difficult for participants to feel able to have difficult conversations. One participant spoke about how they had been feeling the paradox of being "*a bit paralysed, it's like, it's overwhelming"* while also understanding "*it's also partly your responsibility to contribute,"* yet also thinking, "*you've got really no right just shut up, what can I do that's even remotely useful?"* (X9, RC 1, p. 3). However, for them our approach meant that, *"these conversations are a really supportive space and really open space and all that kind of tricky discomfort is in there as well, which is good, because it's not honest otherwise"* (X9, RC 1, p. 3). The feelings of paralysis[39] are not uncommon in white people who have been socialised to avoid confrontation and uncomfortable discussions (DiAngelo, 2011). If coloniality creates a fear "of abandonment, for being faulty, unacceptable, damaged, [and] that if we reveal this aspect of self we may be rejected" (Epp, 2008, p. 245), then unlearning the ways of being that are so damaging is a necessary precursor to making space for learning that is spiritual and relational. The seminars were intentionally planned to unsettle whiteness and coloniality, and by making our own relationships with each other and the colonial matrix visible, this seemed to create a space where participants were also able to face these aspects of themselves. As one participant said, it was helpful,

> *to hear people trying to grapple with similar things, but also explaining themselves and finding how difficult that is - it's not that I was feeling good that there was struggling; it's just nice to know you're not walking alone*. (X5, RC 13, p. 1)

The same participant went on to say how they valued the authentic, invitational, and hospitable approaches we used to build community and that this was felt as a healing process.

> *Just being together in the whole thing was very, very helpful. And there are people who have been there from the very beginning, and I have been listening to their stories. And I've been sharing my stories, I hope, enough to encourage other people also, who are struggling with similar kinds of things. So, for me, the holistic thing of just knowing that I'm not walking alone, has been a very helpful thing for my own wellbeing as well.* (X5, RC 13, p. 1)

Anzaldúa (2015) theorizes that, in these struggles and processes of "conocimiento" or "inner work,"

> As you move from past presuppositions and frames of reference, letting go of former positions, you feel like an orphan, abandoned by all that's familiar. Exposed, naked, disoriented, wounded, uncertain, confused, and conflicted, you're forced to live en la orilla—a razor-sharp edge that fragments you. (p. 125)

However, if you are tender with yourself and others, wounds can become openings across which to connect and to begin to heal. Anzaldúa (2015) describes the process of connecting as:

> Recognizing the preciousness of the earth, the sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity and interdependence of all beings—somos todos un paíz. Love swells in your chest and shoots out of your heart chakra, linking you to everyone /everything— the aboriginal in Australia, the crow in the forest, the vast Pacific Ocean. You share a category of identity wider than any social position or racial label. This

[39] See https://hbr.org/2019/11/getting-over-your-fear-of-talking-about-diversity

> conocimiento motivates you to work actively to see that no harm comes to people, animals, ocean—to take up spiritual activism and the work of healing. Te entregas a tu promesa to help your various cultures create new paradigms, new narratives. (p. 138)

We draw an analogy between the processes of focusing on what fragments us in order to spiritually and ethically connect and heal, and the Japanese art of Kintsugi. Kintsugi is a method of repairing broken pottery that,

> celebrates each artifact's unique history by emphasizing its fractures and breaks instead of hiding or disguising them, [and] by making the repaired piece even more beautiful than the original, revitalizing it with a new look and giving it a second life. (Richman-Abdou, 2022, para. 2)

Photo: adobe48015/Depositphotos

adobe48015. (2021). *Kintsugi white and blue antique Kintsukuroi, real gold restoration* [Stock Image]. My Modern Met. https://mymodernmet.com/kintsugi-kintsukuroi/

Honouring, rather than denying, the past and our connections to colonialism is a crucial part of understanding the diverse ways in which we have all become fractured and disconnected - both internally, and externally in the material and the spirit worlds. Recognising the 'colonial' in 'de/colonial' is the beginning of a path to reconnecting, healing, and becoming whole and, as Anzaldúa (2015) says, it is an act of love. This was recognised and articulated in a conversation with a participant that resonated so much with us that we quote at length below:

> *fatima: When we're doing decolonial work in the global south, it is a different type of work. And it is, it is because we were all colonised there. And so we have the, you know, colonisation of the mind, of the body as slaves, of self, … and the oppression and the marginalisation. And so I've said that before if we do decolonial work in the Global South, we need to start working with love, learning to love ourselves, learning to respect ourselves,*

learning to be proud of our knowledges, ways of being, doing, viewing the world, and learning to like who we are. Because for such a long time, we've been told that we are like dirt on the road.

X5: I agree with you definitely, that we need to love ourselves. Generally, if we don't love ourselves, how do you love anyone else? If you don't know what it looks like with you how do you know how it looks like someone else? So, it has to begin definitely within ourselves. Your own emancipation, your own awareness, and awareness of also your weakness, I think is also very, very important. And it comes with sometimes reflecting upon yourself, but we also know ourselves through the people we relate with. And I think it's really not easy to just love yourself and not love others, I think it's part of the same, it's the same thing. You can't just say you love yourself. I think in order to show that you love yourself, you have to show that you love others. And when others love you, it also shows that you love yourself, it's part of the same coin. So, I would say it's better for us to think of it as are you doing your bit? Are you participating in this loving triangle? As long as you know you are doing your bit as an individual. So, like in music making, are you tapping your rhythm? If you don't tap your rhythm, the other rhythm will not be able to come in at the same time. And then you can't form a harmony or whatever it is that you're building up together as a musical thing, you need to be able to do your bit. Love you the way you love, before others can join into that kind of love. So… I can't say I love myself on my own without talking about, you know [laughs] others loving as well. So maybe that's the communal side of when people talk about Ubuntu being a community-based kind of philosophy, maybe that's what they really mean that you really cannot stand on your own. You have to stand with, through, in, with others.

fatima: So, when I talk about love, loving oneself, I think for me that is the first step that we have to relearn to think about who we are as humans. And how we are interrelated, interconnected and interdependent, but at the same time, and you mentioned this a few minutes ago about emancipatory work, and I was thinking about Paulo Freire and his work and how he used critical literacy to teach adult learners to 'see' how the system oppresses them, and how they through social action make change in the system and in terms of their own understanding. Now I don't think he uses these words. These are just our words, interdependence, interrelated, and interconnectedness, that are crucial to move from love and healing to gaining momentum towards bringing the type of change where, we know that we can't get rid of the lens that we already have but we can try to do things to try to find ways to ameliorate the violence that has been done and then to move it forward into some sort of action, but always with … If we're thinking about spirituality, then you know you're thinking about humaneness, and human, and being human, and what it means to be humane. And so love comes in there because you can't be humane without that type of love for ourselves as a people, not for myself itself, but myself and also for my people.

Fran: I agree, loving actually means loving all of you, the bits that are good, but also the bits that aren't so good. That might seem to some people to be really weird, but they are all still part of who you are. And they all have a history and, and a sort of a political, cultural, social context that created who you are. And I think that's one of the things that fatima and I really tried to pay careful, as in care-full, attention to throughout the [seminar] series, is that we do not in any sense, or shape, or form, play a blame game. What we try to do is to reveal the ways in which we inhabit various modes of being, and doing, and valuing and, and relating in the world. And that includes the relation between the colonial and the decolonial, because they're, they're completely intertwined and connected … But not all cultures, or all nations

have deliberately set out to universally colonise on a global scale, and to force people into their way of thinking and being. And that, of course, is the big, big difference. (RC 13, p. 3-6)

De/colonising work is demanding - intellectually, psychologically, emotionally, and bodily. It is also work that is differently felt and undertaken depending on whether you are in a low-intensity or high-intensity struggle (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; see also an explanation of these terms on p. 15). As citizens of Canada and the UK respectively, fatima and Fran are both involved in a low-intensity struggle; but fatima, through her position as a racialised, colonised subject whose family had to flee her country of birth in the 1970s, and whose spiritual community is persecuted in many parts of the world, has also been involved in a high-intensity struggle. It is the dynamic between these subject positions that informs our work and that we made visible through poetry and narratives in the seminars. In effect, we took risks to expose ourselves in our entirety and to put ourselves in a vulnerable position. Our intention is to embody the interruption and challenge to what Grande (2018) calls:

> The Deep Structures of Colonialist Consciousness: Belief in progress as change and change as progress; belief in the effective separateness of faith and reason; belief in the essential quality of the universe and of 'reality' as impersonal, secular, material, mechanistic, and relativistic; subscription to ontological individualism; and belief in human beings as separate from and superior to the rest of Nature (p. 99).

This is the basis of the knowledge system that upholds the Western university and, due to the inseparability of the modern university with coloniality and thus capitalism, our approach can be seen to be a threat to the individuals and organisations that benefit from that system. As academics, this puts us at risk of possible repercussions such as silencing debate through monitoring social media accounts[40], by suppressing decolonial and anticolonial struggles "in order to protect the state and thereby itself" (Mayorga et al., 2019, p. 93), and by appropriating our work without acknowledging it, re-presenting it in a more acceptable (less disruptive) form. Whilst these are potential risks to us both, they are felt unequally because fatima has the additional risks of harm because of being a colonised subject, being an academic scholar of colour in spaces that perpetuate colonial violence and being more likely to be the recipient of the potential kickback when surfacing the harms / violences of colonialism and its legacies. The emotional labour and its effects on the material and spiritual self should not be under-estimated and our participants were cognisant of this.

> *Neither of you should underestimate the impact that your work over the last nine months has had. I think it would be right to say that. ... I think ... even those that were on board with your thinking beforehand, have opened their eyes in a different way or thought about it differently. And I think that's really important. So I would want to say to you - take comfort from the fact that the sort of work that you do, does have an impact and is important, and we should all hold on to the work that we can do individually and within groups.* (X1, FG 2, p. 24)

> *... So I want to say thank you for being brave enough [laughs] to take this on, and to start making a conversation out of it. I think I was feeling pretty lonely many years ago. So, I'm glad I have a community that's thinking about it that it's made such a huge difference to the way I've approached my work and the confidence I can now go forward with so thank you so much for giving yourselves, I know it has also been a difficult journey for yourselves so I can*

[40] See 'Naked intimidation': how universities silence academics on social media

appreciate that. And so I'm just saying thank you for walking in front of us in that regard. (X5, RC 13, p. 28)

4.2.7 Nascent/Emerging Understandings of De/Colonisation

> *Decolonization involves identifying colonial systems, structures, and relationships and working to challenge those systems. It's not an integration or simple token inclusion. But rather, it involves a paradigm shift from a culture of exclusion and denial, to making space for other political philosophies and knowledge systems.* (X10, FG 1, p. 4)

As we set out at the beginning of this report, although the idea of decolonising higher education has come into common usage over the last couple of years, there are many interpretations of what it means to decolonise - in part due to the specific geo-political, historical, and socio-cultural factors of any given location. In the UK the most prevalent interpretation is to view decolonising higher education as a matter of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and to address this by, for example, increasing the representation of minoritised populations (to counter possible accusations of structural racism) and, as Dhillon (2021) states, to counter epistemic marginalisation in the curriculum. While we do not argue with the centrality of racial inequity to decolonising projects, the focus of the seminar series differed from this dominant interpretation in two regards: First, we follow Bhattacharya (2018a; 2018b) in our understanding, that there is no utopian or 'pure' decolonising space that is separate from colonising spaces because the two are always in relationship (hence the use of the forward slash between de and colonising); and second, in our focus on educational *relationships*, thus signalling that de/colonising processes are necessarily ontological as well as epistemological (Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2020).

As discussed in the previous section, the processes that are central to our praxis are based on developing relationships and community. As a professional development programme, the seminar series provided both mastery and depth education: "If mastery education can be associated with the filling of a cup, depth education is about transforming the cup into an onion and allowing ourselves to experience the pain and joy of peeling its layers" (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 44). Depth education requires investments of time, and of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual energy. What is learned as a result cannot be pre-determined because it emerges through the relationships that are integral to the community and because if and when seeds are sown, it may take months or even years to realise what the seeds may become. In the seminar presentations we provided information and explanations (mastery), albeit in ways that embodied our spiritual, emotional, and intellectual relationships with each other and the subject matter, thus disrupting the rational-objective mode of coloniality. However, it was in the post-seminar discussions and the inquiry conversations that we began to peel the layers of the onion. In these dialogic, conversational spaces there was time to tease out thoughts in relation to the concepts introduced and for participants to relate them to their specific contexts - in this way participants were also our teachers, giving us a finer grained understanding of the differing ways in which our imaginary might be taken up within, and apply to, those contexts.

There were many examples of participants using the language of 'equity, diversity and inclusion' (EDI) that is in common use in Higher Education, and the terms 'anti-racist' and 'anti-oppressive' that are associated with social justice education (RC 10, FG 1, FG 2) but, as discussed in Section 1.2, these approaches do not necessarily focus on colonial relations (Zinga & Styres, 2019; Dhillon, 2021). This demonstrates one of the key challenges to de/colonising relationships - how difficult it is

to de-link from a colonial mindset when there is not yet an alternative language to do so (as also discussed in Sections 4.2.2, 4.2.4 and 4.2.6), and when the system itself rewards colonial behaviours. Colonial logics of superiority / hierarchies of worth were evident in equating decolonisation with inclusion (FG1), and in the gaze towards the British education system as the best, with higher quality research (RC 7 and RC 11); a logic of separation was evident in one research assistant's (RA) early assumption that they should keep their dual roles of RA and participant separate; a logic of domination was evident in participants who wanted to 'make' their teams work in more decolonial ways (RC 6, FG 1), and in the desire to meet their senior managers' requests for simple solutions (RC 5, FG 1); and the logics of replacement and rationality were evident in their discussions about curriculum change (RC 8, FG 1). We also experienced the combined logics of separation, extraction, and domination ourselves when we were approached by a senior member of staff who was not attending the seminars to 'interview' us (and others involved in decolonising projects) about decolonisation. Leaders of any decolonising initiatives were interviewed separately, we did not know who else had been spoken with, and thus the senior member of staff was extracting information from us in order to become the knowledge holder and to control what was presumably in their remit. We view this as typical of the hierarchical leadership structure that the colonial system demands. Nevertheless, in our conversations, participants demonstrated that many of these terms were being unsettled, and that they were developing a deeper understanding of the coloniality of the system and their complicity in it - despite their desire to be, do and know differently (RC 1, RC 13 and FG 2).

For example, one participant spoke about how colonial forces are subtle, insidious, and hidden from explicit view therefore the work is hugely challenging.

> *Most of the scholars who are not in the decolonisation kind of field would think that to decolonise would mean to rewrite your reading list*" and that "*what the [seminar series] helped me to see was how important is the colonisation of the mind ... and for me, that's a much bigger challenge for redesigning education today*. (X7, FG 2, p. 6)

While another participant became much more aware of the need to challenge systems rather than to challenge individual acts and that "*decolonisation is not an integration or simple token inclusion ... it involves a paradigm shift*" (X10, FG1, p.4). The idea that plurality was part of decolonising, but not sufficient, was expressed by a participant with a black African heritage who had a conversation with us about the concept of 'orchestra'. Their position was not that there was not a binary divide between western classical music and the traditional music of their country of origin, and that "*If I may clarify ... It's not [about] trying to get into the western [mindset], I think I don't even need to, my truth is that we already had orchestras ... every community had some kind of ensemble,*" so rather than trying to reproduce western forms of orchestra with their elitist tendencies, "*In my opinion, I would like people to shift their focus to say, "Okay, yes, this exists. But did you know that we had this ensemble? And this is how they work. And this is why they work this way"* (X5, RC 13, p. 8-9).

Another participant explained that they had come to the seminars because they were new to academia and they were teaching a masters level course for the first time.

> *It's sort of raised questions for me the whole way through* [the] *year. And I think it's particularly because there are lots of, and it's primarily international students on the MA course. ... And one of the students said, actually, 'What is this decolonization thing?'*

This participant felt ill-equipped to respond because of the

> *layers of things on top of each other*" and the challenges of "*talking about decolonisation in a decolonising way … and what it really highlighted for me was the different places that everyone is coming from, and how difficult it is to kind of create some kind of common understanding*. (FG 1 p. 5)

At the end of the year they were still "*none the wiser*" about creating de/colonial spaces with students *"within the context of the university and as a result of very rigid assessments"* and that, with regards to a particular international student, they felt they were "*foisting a set of English values and way of thinking on them*" (FG 1, p. 5). In an earlier conversation, the same participant had discussed their growing awareness of their own whiteness and privilege in the education system, and in this later conversation they indicate the aporia of having a strong desire to be and do otherwise as an educator, and at the same time feeling the frustration of still being entangled in the system from which they continue to benefit.

This chimed with another participant who could see that coloniality/capitalism "*runs through everything we teach throughout our curriculum,*" and that because everything is "*completely interconnected with everything else, … you can't just take strands out of it and say, 'we can box that as being something that people can engage with.'"* For them, the challenges of "*moving towards an education, which recognises all of that interconnection, as opposed to trying to box it off, where people can ignore it, or accept it*" would have to deal with that complexity. At the same time they acknowledged that they were feeling less and less clear about terms such as 'truth' and 'knowledge' and that,

> *we are captured within this sort of plasma within this mesh, in which we grapple with these ideas, and the more we grapple with them in the current era, I think the more complex it becomes, and the less clear we can be about how we move forward.* (FG 2, p. 9).

Drawing on their own experience as a headteacher, they also argued that,

> *those in the hierarchy that are in positions to make decisions … I think there is a misunderstanding about how much manoeuvrability those individuals have, actually, probably, the higher you go in an institution, the less manoeuvrability you have, and the more you feel trapped within a system, which is pressed down on by the rhetoric of politicians who pretend to give power, and actually take away more and more power, all the time.* (FG 2, p. 21)

They concluded that something catastrophic needs to happen for transformation to take place - they had some hope that COVID-19 might have that potential but was now sceptical saying, "*it's like being on a piece of elastic, but things happen and then you go back to the status quo*" (FG 2, p. 21).

The discomfort of unsettling and unlearning their entanglements with, and complicities in, coloniality was recognised by many of the participants, "*the uncomfortable feeling of being complicit … it needs to be discussed as uncomfortable as it is*" (RC 13, p. 24) as was the long process of grappling with, and sometimes feeling lost in, the paradoxes, complexities and frustrations of working towards being and doing otherwise. One participant spoke of how they had felt very vulnerable at the beginning of the seminar series, and nervous of saying the wrong thing, but then

> *gradually through being enabled to feel comfortable and uncomfortable"* they felt

> *"supported to be able to go through that process. So there are conversations we have had where I have felt uncomfortable and thought 'Oh I'm not sure how that rests with me. I'm not sure how I feel about that.' But I've learned to live with that. I've learned that that's part of my learning, I've learned that that's okay [laughs]. And that you're not judging me for that.* (X2, RC 12, p. 20)

With regards to our imaginary (Figure 5), we have already discussed the centrality of spirituality and relationality to de/colonising educational relationships in Section 4.2.7. In our conversations, participants also spoke about other concepts within the imaginary that supported deeper understandings. The concepts of invitation and hospitality were mentioned in several conversations (PSD 5, RC 4, RC 7, RC 12, FG 1). One participant said that "*hosting, and what it means to host, and the cultural specificity of that has remained with me"* (FG 1, p. 15), but did not elaborate on what that might mean for their practice. In some conversations, participants explored more deeply what we meant by these concepts (RC 10, p.8) and in one instance a participant argued that,

> *the hospitality approaches and those kinds of approaches that put students learning at the forefront of learning and teaching ... It just occurred to me that it is such an important work but it is a great deal of work that requires teachers' energy, time, and labour"* (PSD 5, p. 1).

We connected this to our work in Canada with pre-service teachers (Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2020) who, when faced with the emotional labour involved, would rather be given a blueprint or model to follow rather than do the work themselves, thus centring themselves instead of thinking about the benefits for the community. However, in the same conversation another participant provided an alternative view, arguing that for them teaching in hospitable ways gives them energy, and it was doing so in spite of the system that created the emotional labour (PSD 5, p. 2). In the post-seminar discussion, another participant spoke about how, in each seminar, there were *"clear connections there. I remember like every time it was thought provoking, even like invitation I remember feeling that it's not, this concept is not sitting well with me. And we talked a little bit about it."*

> fatima: *Why was the concept of invitation not sitting well with you?*
>
> Participant: *Because there was a sense of, there is a guest. If you invite someone to your space, then it's your space, and someone else is your guest. But then you explained to me fatima that there is a critical way of thinking about the invitation and that was not something I did."*
>
> They went away and thought about it, and read our article on the concepts (Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2020) and reflected,
>
> *if I think about the students, how do I - that's the challenge, right? How do we create a sense that this is a mutual space? This is their space, and also mine? That we're together in this rather than one being a guest and one being like someone who's inviting you.* (RC 4, p. 6)

Our focus on the coloniality of spaces, places and boundaries of education was also discussed by participants. In the immediate post seminar discussion one participant equated our ideas with the boundaries of physical/material spaces, "*Sometimes safety means creating a boundary as well.*" (PSD 6, p. 3), which has helped us reflect on how we introduce the concept, starting with a focus on the socio-cultural and identity formation elements. Another participant found our analogy with the

metaphor "An Englishman's home is his castle"[41] useful in framing her understanding of how privacy laws foster violence.

> *The Master's castle enabled violence against women and against children. And the idea of privacy of liberalism is actually, how does it foster violence, right? And basically, once you brought it into the session today, that felt to me really, it resonates with me, because it kind of means that it's a reminder that we are talking about violence in educational spaces, and it's easy to forget that this is the essence of what we're talking about. Yeah.* (PSD 6, p. 5).

They went on to expand their thinking,

> *So it's not only you know, when people are stripped from their personality right, the ability to say 'I am a human being.' This is violent. But also, once you raise children in that way, or even in the student-lecturer relationship, you teach them not to be critical of the status quo, which is violent in and of itself. So that is another aspect of how education fosters social violence, because if students will not challenge the status quo,* [and] *that status quo's result is everyday killing, everyday violence, everyday sexual violence, that means that the education system is participating in enabling it to persist*. (PSD 6, p. 6)

In our work, the analogy of the castle identifies a possible genealogy of the boundaried and possessive nature of colonial thinking that creates discrete categories around phenomena, including in the socio-cultural and material spaces and places of educational institutions. Inspired by Tuck & Yang's (2012) assertion that de/colonisation is not a metaphor we developed this aspect of our imaginary in response to what we might learn from the principle of repatriation of land that could be applied to education - in other words, to explore the connection between identity, land, and educational relationships (Pirbhai-Illich & Martin, 2021). This struck a chord with a participant racialised as Black British who, when talking about identity and belonging, said,

> *I was born here, so it should be mine. It should be that if we've* [the participant and Fran] *got similar relationships to the land, so-called land, that it is mine. But it will never be mine … even if I own the freehold it's never going to be mine … so hence,* [I'm] *someone from nowhere.* (RC 10, p. 9-11)

In this they were talking about their lack of acceptance by the white mainstream as British and that this severely restricted the spaces (including in the university) where they could be authentically themselves. Moreton-Robinson (2015) demonstrates the whiteness of the colonial, possessive relationship with land, a whiteness that is assumed as natural because any other possibility is invisible to those who embody whiteness because those possibilities are on the 'Other' side of the abyssal line[42] (Santos, 2014).

In summary, our imaginary attempts to explore the complexity of de/colonising educational relationships. At the same time as finding the ideas useful, all participants initially struggled with the imaginary in various ways - grappling with them intellectually (seeking clarification), affectively (noting their embodied responses to being unsettled) and spiritually (feelings of being with). Without

[41] See Seminar 6 - Spaces, place and boundaries (Exeter)
[42] "The most fundamental problem confronting us, in my view, in the first decades of the twenty-first century… is the failure to acknowledge the permanence of an abyssal line dividing metropolitan from colonial societies decades after the end of historical colonialism. Such a line divides social reality in such a profound way that whatever lies on the other side of the line remains invisible or utterly irrelevant." (Santos, 2014, p. 70)

the post seminar discussions and the conversations, it may have been more challenging for participants to process their thoughts and feelings, and we certainly would not have learnt as much as we have about whether our imaginary could be adapted to a UK context and how it might be taken up in differing educational settings. Within the participant group there was evidence that they were beginning to think differently about de/coloniality and applying these new lenses to their work as educators and doctoral students[43] (FG 1, FG 2, RC 13). As an example, two participants who run continuing professional development courses for teachers indicated that the imaginary was having a transformational influence on their work because, as one of them said,

> *even if we're going to run a literacy workshop, or we're going to run a geography workshop, or a fair-trade day, there are also always power structures that can be colonial. So, I think what I'm trying to say is, I think we've taken the notions of relationality, invitation and hospitality that are central to what's coming out of this project,* while the other responded saying, '*I think you're too humble. We've tried doing it in our whole life, not just our work [laughs].'* (RC 12, p. 4-5)

For us this is a great example of countering the colonial logic of separation and understanding that de/colonisation infuses *all* aspects of life because everyone and everything in one way or the other is interconnected, interrelated and interdependent.

Conclusion

In this project, through a seminar series for faculty, administrative staff, and doctoral students, we sought to develop deeper understandings of the coloniality of global relations and how these are played out from the macro scale of governments and supra-national organisations, through to the meso scale of national institutions and systems, to the micro scale of educational relationships in universities, schools and classrooms. Our aim was to disrupt the hegemony of coloniality/modernity in higher education by challenging the dominant neoliberal/capitalist narratives, making explicit the colonial foundations on which contemporary global relations are built, including in education. As referred to previously, in our attempts to work towards de/colonising educational relationships, we understand that we are all implicated in the colonial project and that there is no decolonial without the colonial because nations, and thus global relations, around the world have been imagined through a colonial lens. For many in the Global South[44], hybridised identities are the reality, where individuals and communities live with the tensions and paradoxes of both supporting the colonial structures left behind by the colonisers and creating new and/or hybridised structures for survival in the global economy. For many Indigenous populations in settler nations, decolonisation is the rematriation of land. We support this agenda but understand that as non-Indigenous scholars, our involvement in this process can only happen if we're invited as allies. What we *can* do instead, is to start untangling aspects of the socio-historical, geo-political, educational, and economic relationships with coloniality that are embedded in our institutions and structures of governance in order to understand and accept our own complicity in perpetuating material and symbolic colonial violence

[43] We did not have any administrators in our participant group

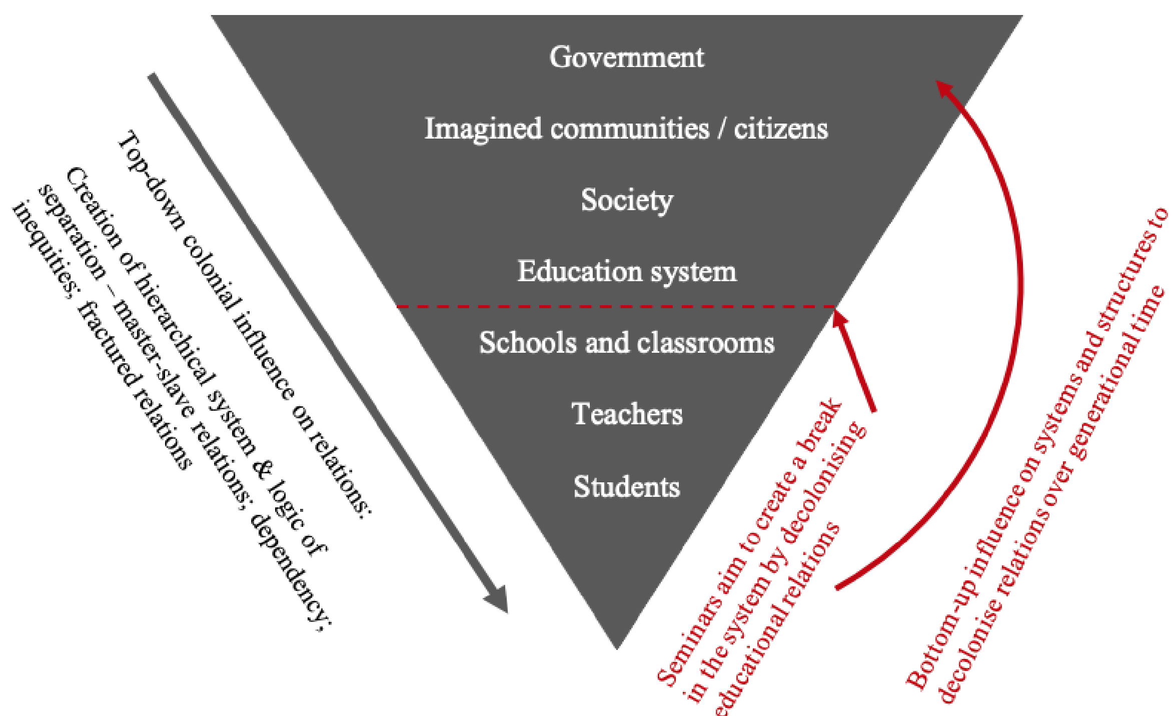
[44] When we use the terms Global North and Global South, we capitalise them to show that they are political, social and cultural distinctions as well as geographical locations. Rather than drawing on a development studies definition that divides countries into Global North and Global South, we use the term *Global South* "as a space of resistance against neoliberal capitalism. Moving beyond country-based perspectives, this has reframed the 'Global South' as a marker for anti-hegemonic engagement that can happen anywhere" (Haug, 2021, para. 8).

within this system. For if we have not de/colonised ourselves, how would it be possible to do de/colonial work? From this first step we can then work towards ameliorating the psychological, cultural, spiritual, and material harms that are the product of colonial hegemonic systems and structures.

To that end, our seminar series focused on making explicit the nature of colonial relations, and how we are all caught up in the colonial matrix (Quijano, 2007). By revealing the colonial foundations on which contemporary global relations have been built, our aim was to explore how it might be possible to begin to develop different [de/colonial] ways of thinking and being that could be enacted at a local / micro scale, causing a break in the top-down influence of coloniality that ultimately, most likely over generational time, might lead to a bottom-up influence to de/colonise, reimagine and thus transform the inequitable relationships that shape the legal, economic, educational systems and structures affecting us all (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Interrupting Colonial Hierarchies of Power



Because of our belief in Bhattacharya's (2018a) use of the forward slash in 'de/colonising' (there is no utopian decolonial space and thus we continue to be complicit in perpetuating the systems and structures that uphold colonialism while also, *at the same time,* seeking to disrupt them), and because we have witnessed this in our own relationship, we drew on these insights as we worked towards de/colonising our praxis both pedagogically and methodologically. The project was therefore underpinned by three principles:

- to disrupt traditional academic practices of producing knowledge that are rooted in colonial, hierarchical mindsets and to pay attention to onto-epistemic pluralism
- to draw on and make explicit the convergences and dissonances in our ways of thinking, being, doing and viewing the world - bringing these together in conversation
- to demonstrate the ways in which we are all interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent, and how to de/colonise our praxis with this in mind
- to explicitly acknowledge the ways in which our work has been inspired by philosophers, theorists, and academics from the global south, and thus to expand the repertoire available to our participants beyond the knowledges of the western academy

In her chapter on 'Research through Imperial Eyes,' Smith (2012) sets out the many ways in which "forms of imperialism and colonialism, notions of the Other, and theories about human nature" (p. 45) are embedded in Western research. Western research both "contributed to, and drew from, these systems of classification, representation and evaluation" (Smith, 2012, p. 45) creating 'rules' of classification, framing and practice that enable 'knowledge' about the world to be constructed and recognised. One of the aims of our project was to turn the academic gaze[45] 180 degrees to demonstrate how white people might be viewed by Indigenous and other minoritized and marginalised peoples. Our (fatima and Fran) work on ourselves at the personal level and our academic partnership enabled us to demonstrate differing lenses and, in the following paragraphs, we set out what we have learnt about our approach to this professional development project, and how it relates to relationships at a global scale.

A question we asked ourselves at the start of the project was "Can the imaginary for de/colonising educational relationships we developed in a Canadian teacher education context be adapted for a UK context? In effect, can the colonisers be de/colonised?" We found that participants were able to connect to the content and to the methodology and that this was the beginning of a long process of conscientization for them, confirming for us that any project in de/colonising relationships is a long-term venture. Our findings therefore suggest that adapting our imaginary for different contexts is possible, as long as we are attentive to the geo-political and socio-cultural histories of those contexts and their relationship to land and the colonial world system. The colonial and colonising logics of separation and superiority, elimination and extraction are so deep-seated in Euro-western ways of relating from local through to global scales, and so implicitly assumed as *the* way of relating that they render any other ways of relating invisible. It also confirmed for us the extent to which this is exacerbated by the entanglement of coloniality with the English language and the power that English, as a global language or lingua franca, wields.

> No language in history has been used by so many people or spanned a greater portion of the globe. It is aspirational: the golden ticket to the worlds of education and international commerce, a parent's dream and a student's misery, winnower of the haves from the have-nots. It is inescapable: the language of global business, the internet, science, diplomacy, stellar navigation, avian pathology. And everywhere it goes, it leaves behind a trail of dead: dialects crushed, languages forgotten, literatures mangled. (Mikanowski, 2018, para. 4)

Maldonado-Torres (2016) discusses how colonial power is used to control all areas of life, a power that is exerted through a variety of mechanisms, examples of which are shown in the right-hand

[45] A gaze that traditionally focuses on the Other as the object of study

column of Figure 7, all of which are also controlled by the acceptance of English as the dominant means of communication.

Figure 7

The Coloniality of Power and Its Controlling Mechanisms

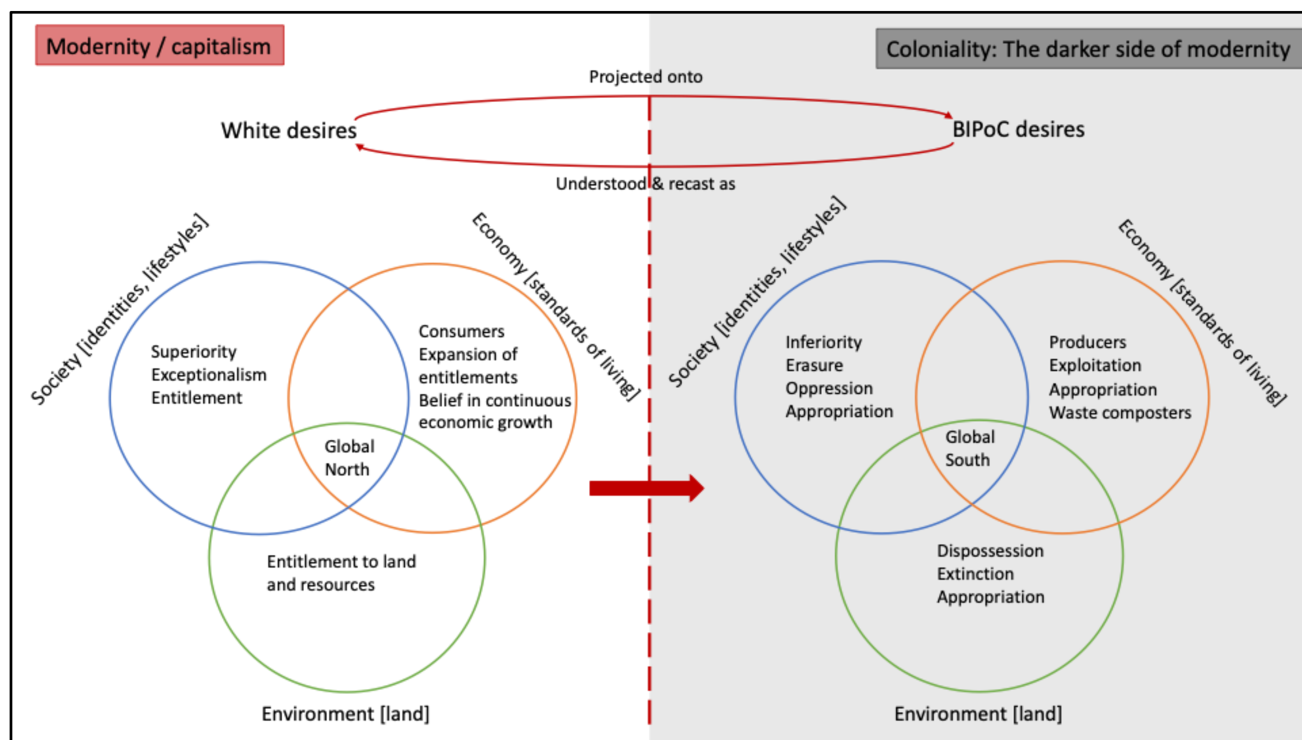
Note. Adapted from (Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

Although shown as discrete categories in Figure 7, the five areas of control are interconnected and work together in different combinations depending on the situation and context. These combinations act at a variety of scales, from local to global, and in order to understand how Higher Education and the Western Academy are implicated, we return to the colonial/modern/capitalist world-system (Grosfoguel, 2011) and its global influence on social, economic and environmental relations.

Terminology in Figure 8: We use the terms Global North and Global South as political and ideological distinctions that exist within as well as between nation states. We use the terms 'white' and 'BIPoC' (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) to indicate political, racialised distinctions that divide the world between those who benefit from coloniality/modernity/capitalism and those who are disadvantaged by this ideology and its systems and structures (the darker side of modernity). The imaginary draws on Grosfoguel's (2002) reinterpretation of the "capitalist world system" in which he situates his "knowledge production not in representation of, but from the subaltern experiences of people in the South" (p. 203), and on Mignolo's (2011) thesis on 'The Darker Side of Western Modernity' in which he demonstrates how Western modernity is founded on coloniality/capitalism.

Figure 8

The Colonial/Modern/Capitalist World-System



Note. Inspired by (Grosfoguel, 2002; Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Mignolo, 2000; Quijano, 2000; Santos, 2007).

On the left-hand side of Figure 8 is the image of the Global North that is projected by those in society who are invested in modernity/capitalism because it supports their Euro-western lifestyles and high standards of living. The socio-cultural imaginary is one of the superiority of white, Euro-western lifestyles, the exceptionalism of Western nations and, as a result, the assumed entitlement of white populations in the Global North to their 'advanced' lifestyles (Machado de Oliveira, 2021). Economically, neoliberal capitalism is a continuation of colonial capitalism and has increased the wealth of the Global North in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as manufacturing and food production has been outsourced to the Global South. Power has been exerted through supranational corporations such as the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund (Figure 7), and multinational corporations such as Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, McDonald's, and Volkswagen. Due to their supranational nature, they are able to exert a power that transcends that of nation states and strategic economic alliances such as the European Union - all of these organisations have headquarters located in the Global North[46]. Through the logic of separation, the environment - the land itself, and its material and other than human resources - are viewed as objects to which there is an entitlement to access, possess and exploit in the service of capitalism and Euro-western lifestyles and standards of living.

[46] See What Countries Are Most Multinational Corporations Based in?

The right-hand side of Figure 8 portrays the darker side / the coloniality of modernity. It is shown in grey and as separate from Euro-western modernity because it reveals the subaltern experiences of violence that is the darker side of modernity; something that those on the left-hand side would rather that it remained invisible to them. The violent effects of coloniality on the societies, economies and environments of the Global South are summarised here (see Section 1.1 for further detail). What is shown on the right-hand side does not represent the ways of being, doing, knowing and valuing of the cultures, the individual and communitarian identities, the economies and the relationships with land and the world of those in the Global South. *It shows what has been forced upon them by coloniality and the shadow of modernity/capitalism in which they exist.* The power of the imaginary of modernity is that,

> While most people believe that rich countries support poorer countries in their 'development' there is ample empirical evidence showing that it is the other way around. Most of the wealth of countries in the global north comes from and is sustained by historical and systemic processes of exploitation, resource extraction, land-grabbing, unfair trade, enforced debt, and tied aid. Modernity hides the costs of modern development so that we can continue to buy it and enjoy it as a goal. (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 67)

The red line that separates modernity/capitalism from coloniality is de Santos' (2007) abyssal line - an invisible distinction that is founded on visible distinctions and that render the right-hand side of the line invisible because it is produced by the Global North as nonexistent. "What most fundamentally characterises abyssal thinking is thus the impossibility of the co-presence of the two sides of the line" (Santos, 2007, p. 1). Therefore, the hierarchical, binary and oppositional nature of coloniality not only casts the colonial/darker side of modernity as 'Other' to the so-called success story of western nations, but it also renders it invisible. However, Grosfoguel, Mignolo, Machado de Oliveira and Santos show us that there is no binary opposition - we are all inextricably entangled together in an interdependent, interconnected, but grossly inequitable, global relationship, and it is this that is revealed through de/colonising projects.

Returning to our focus on de/colonising educational relationships, as Andreotti et. al. (2015) state, the pedagogical challenges in exposing the darker side of modernity is "formidable, given the interdependence of the various social relations that constitute modernity's shadow" (p. 25). It is particularly challenging when it is expected that those who supposedly present a problem should also be responsible for providing a solution such as an intervention, a set of guidelines, or a blueprint to follow. Yet these expectations are also the product of coloniality - the desire for certainty, for quick fixes and simple solutions that we discussed in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, and that our project deliberately tries to avoid. The notion of desire - expressed variously as want, yearning, aspiration, longing - came up in many of our conversations with participants. The more we reflected on it the more we found it a helpful way of explaining some of the aporias and paradoxes that were evident in how participants understood, interpreted and acted on their shifting levels of awareness of their relationship with modernity/coloniality/decoloniality. At the top of Figure 8, we have therefore suggested an entangled relationship between white (Eurowestern / modern) desires and Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPoC) desires. Our argument is that white desires (to be superior/exceptional, to consume, to believe in the possibility of continuous economic growth), through the coloniality of power (Figure 7), are so hegemonic that they are projected onto / colonise the desires of BIPoC populations as a desire to have access to the standards of living in the Global North. Where there is BIPoC resistance to the hegemony of white desires in the form of alternative desires expressed through activism (e.g., Indigenous populations demands for rematriation of land; Black Lives Matter protests; Rhodes Must Fall), these are understood through the lens of whiteness

and its abyssal exclusions[47], and thus understood and recast as, white desires. We illustrate this through two examples from Higher Education below: structural domination of desires in the social realm; and structural domination of desires in the economic realm.

Lewis (n.d.) argues that "the idea of colonised desire is rooted in the structure and systemic construction of desire" and that, "our desires, like our identities, don't belong to us fully, they never have" (para. 1). When whiteness is projected as the unmarked, unnamed norm (Wekker, 2016), BIPoC are constantly marked as 'Other'. The logic of separation creates "an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 41). Like many colonised people, fatima describes how, as a result of the colonial logic of superiority, her experience of being on the other side of the line is that her identity is positioned as inferior creating a fear of being faulty, unacceptable, damaged. To avoid this form of rejection some conform to the values of the dominant culture - they desire to be included in the 'white club' and attempt to push the perceived 'unacceptable' parts of themselves into the shadows, in effect taking on white desires; others rebel, becoming conscious of what Anzaldúa (1999) refers to as the 'Shadow-Beast,' kicking out against being defined by others.

Structurally, the power to control identities is exerted through legal systems (the right to define categories of identity; the right to deny protest) and through knowledge and subjectivity via, for example, the Eurocentric epistemologies that are central to knowledge production in the western academy. The complicity of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Global North is evident in the dominant interpretation of BIPoC desires – "the colonial state utilises an affective economy as a mechanism by which a desire to belong to the collective (that harms) is created as a desire for recognition" (Grande, 2018, p. 55). In other words, to white Europeans, the demands of BIPoC "are only recognisable as the desire for recognition and more intense inclusion" (Grande, 2018, p. 55). This was only too evident in the conversations we had with participants about the universally accepted, but largely unquestioned, location of decolonisation within Equality, Diversity and Inclusion structures (see Section 4.2.2), and in the dominant interpretation of decolonising higher education as the need to decolonise the curriculum. However, while there may be some interest convergence (Bell, 1980) in relation to the desire for recognition and representation, the goals for universities and BIPoC are not the same; Universities have an over-riding economic interest (to make the university more attractive to international students who pay high fees), while BIPoC have a social and racial justice interest. Theories of justice and the politics of recognition that inform EDI policies and practices are largely "elucidated through liberal discourses" (Grande, 2018, p. 54) and institutional responses often frame 'inclusion' as a benevolent gift, with racially minoritized staff "expected to perform their gratitude and refrain from further dissent" or "risk being considered ungrateful, unproductive or uncivil" (Stein & Andreotti, 2016, p. 4). In essence, the relationship is still Othering, and can lead to a situation where representation has been achieved, but structurally nothing else has changed. Additionally, when inclusion of diverse knowledges in the curriculum is viewed through the colonial logics of superiority and universality, it can lead to misinterpretations of what decolonising the curriculum might mean, which in turn can and has been used by the media as scare tactics to prevent any further decolonial action[48].

[47] "On the metropolitan side [modernity] we can claim rights, as we are fully human. Conversely, on the colonial side, exclusion is abyssal, people are sub-human, and therefore have no rights" (Santos, 2017, p. 237).
[48] See, for example, the recent reporting of Chaucer disappearing from the University of Leicester's English Curriculum [Why Chaucer is disappearing from the university curriculum | The TLS]

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are also complicit in the production of academic identities that reproduce colonial educational relations. As academics, we "are trained in reason, logic, science-centric thinking" which gives us an "arrogant desire for explanation for everything" (Rhee, 2021, p. 2). Academic "arrogance is not just a personal trait, but a systemically enforced privilege of certain groups of people" (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 154). Institutional arrogance is seen in the hierarchies of disciplines, the privileging of scientific knowledges, the marginalisation of spiritual knowledges and ways of being, the funding mechanisms that privilege STEM research, the rewarding of academics who embody [white, western, heteropatriarchal] authoritative, competitive, and arrogant identities, and the marginalisation of academics who embody unassuming, cooperative, and humble identities. And if academic arrogance is rewarded by HEIs, institutional arrogance is a product of the coloniality of power. Structurally, in the neoliberal era, universities are controlled by legislation and government policies that position them as independent economic units that have to compete for superior positions in world rankings[49] and national rankings.[50] Academic desires are then cast within a controlling economic framework of scholars as modes of production (publish or perish), where [western] knowledge is commodified and valued for its contribution to the economy.

In short, the coloniality of power (Figure 7) continues to dominate global relations in all areas and the complexities of these relationships, and their entanglements are so vast that they are hard to grasp, let alone understand. This is exacerbated by the coloniality of the [white, western, heteropatriarchal] desire for certainty, control, explanation, logic, reason and solutions. Yet, "with this pursuit of explanation, we often fail to consider that we simply cannot understand or grasp the weight, depth and complexity of reality" (Rhee, 2021, p. 3) because explanation is only possible from within the boundaries and limits of what we can understand, think and imagine. "So, everything has to sound logical and reasonable without inconsistency or incongruency" (Rhee, 2021, p. 10). It is precisely the 'weight, depth and complexity' of coloniality and its influence on global - and therefore educational - relationships that our project was designed to explore. It was a praxis driven project in critical relationality that has spirituality (see Section 4.2.6) at its core. It was not a recipe for others to follow, nor an analysis that would arrive at a solution. Rather it was an enactment and embodiment of the convergences and dissonances in our ways of thinking, being, doing and viewing the world - bringing these into conversation and seeing what emerged as a result. We drew on everyday, taken for granted social phenomena and theorised from these to provide alternative interpretations of what might constitute education, pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment and for whom. It was not a project about being 'right' or 'wrong', or about having the arrogance to think that we had 'the' answers; it was about revealing the colonial foundations of the causes of inequities - countering colonial logics of separation, simple solutions, hierarchies of worth/value, practices of extraction, exploitation and appropriation, and the nonexistence / invisibility of spirituality in our educational relationships; it was about working together across racialized identities, ethically and relationally with others to begin to develop new consciousnesses; about our interdependence, inter-relations and interconnectedness with all around us, how embedding spirituality in our ways of thinking may alter our actions and views of all around us; it is about new pluriversal (Santos, 2007) ways of thinking and being, and understanding that decolonising anything including de/colonising educational relationships will always be evolving, a work in progress during our lifetime and that as we move forward that we would continue to make mistakes and that each mistake would teach us something new.

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[49] e.g., Times Higher Education (https://www.timeshighereducation.com) and QS World University Rankings (https://www.topuniversities.com)

[50] e.g., in the UK, the Research Excellence Framework, (REF) (https://www.ref.ac.uk/about-the-ref/what-is-the-ref/) and the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework, (TEF) (https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/teaching-excellence-framework)

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Appendix A

Examples of Emails Inviting Seminar Attendees to Participate in the Inquiry

<u>16 April 2021. Email to doctoral student studying at Exeter and working as a headteacher in the Global South.</u>

Dear ,

How are you? How is the new headship going? Have things settled down yet? It has been a trying year for many as it is without starting a new headship and relocating!

Thank you for taking part in some of the seminars on De/colonising Educational Relationships. It is a well-worn phrase, but this last year has been challenging for everyone in different ways so we have been heartened that you have found the time to join us when you have been able to.

As you may be aware, we have funding from both our universities to conduct a pilot study on how people have engaged with the seminars and what they have learnt from them. We are now seeking your consent to include in the research any information you may have provided during the seminars through the zoom chat, the activities we have done, and the additional half-hour discussion at the end of the seminars run in January, February and March and for the rest of following seminar presentations that you may attend.

We are writing to anyone who has come to one or more seminars and would like to invite you to join us for a chat about what this involves by zoom on either April 28th at 1 p.m. or April 29th at 1.30 p.m. If you would like to come to one of these meetings, please let us know which is best for you. If neither is suitable, we are happy to have an individual chat with you at a time of your choosing.

We look forward to hearing from you, with best wishes
fatima and Fran

17 April 2021. Reply to email above.

Dear Fatima and Fran
Thank you for writing to me personally. I have been so stimulated and encouraged by the seminars. Even when I have not been able to attend live I have had the opportunity to listen to the recordings. It has been a very tough beginning and the need to decolonise education is so urgent in colonised parts of the world like . I have felt the weight of colonisation and the recolonisation of apartheid most keenly. I am eager to have some think time to chart a way forward for myself in this role. I'll share some insights when I can.
Thinking of you both

11 May 2021. Emails sent to participants inviting them to a conversation.

Dear [redacted],
We hope you are staying well and safe just as we are trying to do at this time.
We would like to begin by thanking you for giving your consent to taking part in the De/colonising Educational Relationships research project – your commitment is much appreciated. At this time, we would like to meet with our participants and therefore would like to invite you to have a research conversation with us. To enable a more inviting, hospitable, relational atmosphere we are scheduling to meet with two people at a time. If we had been able to do this face to face, we would have invited you to have a drink and a snack with us – but as we are not able to do so, please do bring a drink and snack of your choosing to the zoom call if you would like to! We will be doing the same.
Using the doodle poll link below, would you please identify two dates and times that you would be available. If none of the times are suitable, please could you propose some dates and times that you could do, and we will make ourselves available. If you could complete the doodle poll by this Friday, May 14th, it would be much appreciated.
Many thanks and with best wishes
fatima and Fran

11 May 2021. Reply from a doctoral student from the Global South studying at Exeter.

Dear fatima and Fran,
Thank you so much for your email and for your invitation. We miss your engaging and thought-provoking sessions. I would be more than happy to have this research conversation with you. Since I have entered the world of academia, you were the first one who approached me using the word 'conversation' than 'interview', and reading it made me feel differently (in a positive way) unlike interviews though I got use to them now. It is interesting how the choice of words can have a significant impact on someone's attitude.

I have ticked two possible dates, so I hope they are suitable. Alas, I will be missing the next session on Thursday because I will be celebrating Eid, so it is important for me to call and FaceTime with my loved ones in [redacted] and beyond albeit online. But I am looking forward to the recording.

Best wishes
[redacted]

Appendix B

Mid Series Evaluation Questions

<u>Working towards de/colonising educational relationships seminar series evaluation</u>

We are nearing the midpoint of the seminar series and would welcome some feedback. Please answer the questions below.

1. Please indicate which of the seminars you have *attended*

    1. Introduction to Colonisation and De/colonisation
    2. Exploring Whiteness and Teacher Ontologies
    3. Race and Racism in Education
    4. A Spiritual Dimension to De/colonising Educational Relationships

2. Please indicate which of the seminars you have *viewed online*

    1. Introduction to Colonisation and De/colonisation
    2. Exploring Whiteness and Teacher Ontologies
    3. Race and Racism in Education
    4. A Spiritual Dimension to De/colonising Educational Relationships

3. To what extent has the content of the seminar/s so far met your expectations? Please explain.
4. Which elements of the seminar/s have you found most useful and why?
5. How have you found the balance of delivery style? (Presentations, activities, discussion)
6. How might the seminar/s you have attended so far be improved?
7. What are you hoping to gain from the rest of the seminar series?
8. In seminars 3 and 4 we introduced a half-hour question/answer/discussion period at the end of the seminar. If you stayed on for one or both of these, what did you gain from this opportunity?

Appendix C

Spirituality and Relationality

Our inclusion of a spiritual dimension has emerged from our personal experiences (as exemplified in fatima's narrative at the beginning) and theorising from these everyday experiences.

The content from this slide comes directly from fatima's and Fran's experiences with spirit/uality – although we come to this from different paths, we have many areas of convergence.

fatima was brought up in a faith-based tradition of spirituality where we learned from childhood that we are all interconnected, interrelated and that we were interdependent to the people on this earth, those beyond the human and the materiality around us; that we had an equal ethical responsibility to these aspects and the sense of generosity that goes along with the three ways of thinking about being in the world. We also invoke our ancestral spirits/souls to bless us in our daily lives and to keep an eye over us and to guide us and through daily meditation we attempt to achieve a spiritual connection with God/spirit- to become one with God. However, we understand that meditation alone cannot achieve this - we have to remember and act in accordance with our understandings of interconnectedness, interrelatedness, and interdependence on one another and that our duty to achieving this oneness with God and our responsibilities in the world have equal weightage. Spirituality therefore cannot exist in my world view without a critical understanding of the different forms of relationality, what it means to be spiritual, human, and humane and that these cannot be separated into distinct categories of mind and spirit (Cartesian split?). In other words, it is part of my identity (esoteric and the exoteric) are not separable.

Fran comes to spirituality from her ethical relationship in and with the world and the beings around her and her understandings of plural knowledges. Although brought up in the tradition of the Cartesian split of mind and body, which included being brought up as a Christian, she left the church

in her early twenties due to disillusionment with what she perceived to be the dogma of the Christian faith. Perhaps because of her experiences as a farmer's daughter intimately connected to the land and all living beings, Fran comes to spirituality in her ways of being, feeling, viewing, and doing in the world where she connects with land, spirit, soul, energy across time and space.

In both our instances, although differently, spirituality is embodied in the way that we ethically practise our daily lives, in our ways of thinking, viewing, and doing in the world. It is about our practice of unconditional generosity, our understanding and acceptance of the pluriversality of knowledges both in and beyond the material world. It is a holistic understanding of what it means to be generous of spirit, of intellect and knowledge, and of what it means to be human, and humane.

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