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The Ivory Tower Must Fall: Exploring the Decolonisation of Higher Education at Cambridge University in Theory and Practice

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how many times has this all been said before? (Lorde 1984, 117)

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Abstract

What would it mean to decolonise the University of Cambridge, a centre of knowledge production with roots in both colonial and neo-colonial regimes? To approach such a broad question, I combine constructivist grounded theory with militant social activist research to explore the variety of meanings awarded to the movement by academics involved within it. Drawing on interviews across ten different departments, as well as insights from over 50 hours of active participant research, this project bridges discussions across the University of Cambridge and provides a comprehensive view of the present decolonisation movement. Broadly speaking, the movement calls for a rigorous, reflexive and historically-aware curriculum, at an equitable, just and genuinely inclusive university, which refuses to enact or support neo-colonial violence at home or abroad. But rather than just providing a summary, this project aims to stimulate the reflection and shared discussion that is needed for the movement to advance.

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Vignette 1: Senate House, University of Cambridge (31st October 2017, 5pm)

It's already dark by the time the speeches start – over 200 students are here and there's a real buzz – speakers are cheered before they even begin. The event was called by five different student groups as a public declaration of support for "the goal of decolonising the university", as well as in solidarity with the Students' Union's Women's Officer, Lola Olufemi, who was recently targeted in the Daily Telegraph for her involvement in attempts to 'decolonise' the English Faculty.[1] The student support is the strongest it's even been, certainly the loudest. Chants ring out across King's Parade: "Hey, ho, racist theory has got to go", "democratise, decolonise", and "power to the third world, no to colonialism". Across the front of the rally, a banner reads "the university is the master's house". Other students hold cardboard placards, adorned with quotes by Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Chinua Achebe and Frantz Fanon. There are members of faculty here too, and some even deliver speeches. One speaker recognises all the work that has been done so far, and emphasises that decolonisation is "not an appeal to the special interests of minority groups" but rather a co-ordinated effort to oppose the "sanctioned ignorance" in education, academia and society. These voices do not die out in the night, they become a call to action, they galvanise a movement.

Chapter 1: Introducing Decolonisation at the University of Cambridge

The rally described above was not the start of decolonisation efforts at Cambridge, but rather it built upon the global wave that began with *Rhodes Must Fall* in 2015, of which Achille Mbembe told the University of Cape Town: "Today, the decolonising project is back on the agenda worldwide". In the wake of *Rhodes Must Fall*, the Cambridge University Students' Union's BME Campaign ran an event titled: "why is my curriculum white?", in partnership with key figures from the parallel movement at Oxford University and the National Union of Students (NUS).[2] Faculty involvement

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[1] A large photo of Olufemi was featured on the front page of *The Telegraph* (25th Oct 2017) under the misleading headline "Student forces Cambridge to drop white authors". In the days that followed, over 100 Cambridge academics signed a public statement denouncing the article as "deliberately misleading and racially inflammatory". Following this outcry (although not before Olufemi had become the target of extensive online abuse), *The Telegraph* published two separate corrections, the first identifying the inaccuracies in its reporting (specifically that: "neither they nor the open letter called for the University to replace white authors with black ones and there are no plans to do so"), and the second apologising to Olufemi directly.

[2] Of course, liberation work existed before the 'decolonisation' label too, although one interview participant lamented: "there's no conversation about what decolonisation looked like in Cambridge before the wave came from Oxford"

gained pace in the following year, when four Cambridge lecturers established a CRASSH (2016) funded *Decolonising the Curriculum in Theory and Practice* research group that ran ten seminars on decolonisation in a range of different contexts. This seminar series was described by one interviewee as being "really successful, we couldn't have asked for more in terms of interest, getting students from all levels, undergraduate, through to MPhil and PhD and loads of Postdocs coming" (P8). Where the seminar series informed a core group of students and faculty members, it was the media coverage and fallout of the open letter to the English Faculty that led decolonisation to become a hot-button issue at Cambridge.[3] As of May 2018, decolonisation initiatives at Cambridge had spread to over a dozen different departments; including Anthropology, Archaeology, Classics, Education, English, Geography, History, History of Art, History and Philosophy of Science, Law, Medieval and Modern Languages, Music, Philosophy, Politics and International Studies, and Sociology. It is against this backdrop of a social movement building momentum that this research project is situated.

Evoking the recent decolonisation movement *Rhodes Must Fall*, the title of this paper (*The Ivory Tower Must Fall*) is intentionally provocative; capturing the sentiment that a truly 'decolonised' university would require a "fundamental overhaul of the whole epistemological model underlying the current educational system" (Letsekha 2013, 9). Whether or not this critique warrants a physical demolition job, the intended contribution of this paper is to render the 'ivory tower' a marked term, even a dirty word, by exposing the injustices of the neoliberal university (Oliveira Andreotti et al 2015), not least in perpetuating "white ignorance" (Mills 2007, 26), "epistemic violence" (Heleta 2016, 2), and bodies out of place (Puwar 2004). Drawing on intensive and investigative interviews with academics from ten different departments, this project bridges discussions across the University of Cambridge and provides a comprehensive view of the present decolonisation moment. I hope this project can be of practical use; helping to both reflect upon and advance the conversation regarding decolonisation, as well as aiding in the communication of aims to a wider audience. The audience that I have in mind throughout the paper is those outside of the decolonisation movement who may

(Wamai, P4). Equally, decolonisation has a long history before *Rhodes Must Fall*: "starting in African universities, since the 1960s with decolonisation from the British occupation" (Wamai, P4).

[3] One interview participant reflected "that the Lola issue did radicalise a lot of people and provided the focus for a lot of these organisational efforts, and I don't think the student support would have been as strong without that galvanising thing" (P6).

be unaware or uninformed of the project's agenda and rationale. Drawing on my own positionality as white, male and middle-class; I hope that this piece might speak to those who may not otherwise think of decolonisation as a cause that affects them.

The research question: "What does decolonisation mean for Cambridge?" alludes both to how the term is understood by those involved in decolonising work, as well as the significance of the project for the university itself as an institution of higher education. This research question is an amalgamation of two further questions set out by the *Decolonising the Curriculum in Theory and Practice* research group, which asked: "What would it mean to decolonise the curriculum in Cambridge?" and "what place does decolonising the curriculum have in the broader demands for decolonising the university?" (CRASSH 2016). These questions are considered in turn across Chapters 5 and 6. In approaching these questions, I respond to Zondi's (2018, 18) call for "structured conversations within and across disciplines about the meanings and implications of the struggles for decolonised free education." I share the belief forwarded by Oliveira Andreotti et al (2015, 22) "that examining the complexities, tensions, and paradoxes that emerge in different decolonization efforts is vital pedagogical work". These conversations must be carefully managed so that Indigenous and 'subaltern' voices are not silenced or spoken over (Spivak 1988), but rather are positioned to lead and direct "corresponding effort and change in the imperial centre" (Takayama et al 2016, 19). This paper hopes to make a small contribution to that corresponding effort, from the imperial centre of the University of Cambridge, by investigating the meanings awarded to decolonisation by those academics most involved in the present movement.

A potential critique of this approach is forwarded by Tuck and Yang (2012, 35), who challenge questions like "what will decolonisation look like?" or "what will be the consequences of decolonisation for the settler?" as attempts to reconcile such movements with the status quo; diffusing any radical implications and ensuring 'settler norms' continue to dominate into the future. The authors present an "ethic of incommensurability", which asserts that such questions do not need to be answered, and rather decolonisation should be exclusively concerned with "Indigenous-led demands for radical restructuring of land, resources and wealth globally" (Esson et al 2017, 385). Without dismissing this important challenge, I present the notion of decolonisation as it has been

used in the context of Cambridge, to enable reflection on the scope and barriers to the movement as well as the critique of co-option.

Broadly speaking, the decolonisation movement at the University of Cambridge is a call for a rigorous, reflexive and historically-aware curriculum, at an equitable, just and genuinely inclusive university, which refuses to enact or support neo-colonial violence at home or abroad. However, it should be noted from the outset that interview participants held different views on the scope of decolonisation work, with some preferring to focus exclusively on colonial legacies within the curriculum, whereas others supported broader theoretical and material critiques that greatly expanded the decolonisation agenda. Further consideration of the scope of decolonisation is considered in Chapter 4.

To begin this exploratory research project, I will first situate the study within the existing literature, and outline the theoretical approach taken towards the study of decolonisation in higher education (Chapter 2). I then provide an overview of the methods used in the study (Chapter 3), followed by a consideration of how best to define decolonisation in the Cambridge context (Chapter 4). As previously mentioned, Chapter 5 considers decolonisation in relation to the curriculum and processes of knowledge production, and Chapter 6 expands these critiques to address the university more broadly. In Chapter 7, I consider decolonisation as a social justice movement; followed by accounts of decolonisation as a shared project of 'learning and unlearning', advanced by cross-hierarchical dialogue in Chapter 8. Finally, in Chapter 9, I reflect on the findings of this study in relation to central decolonisation works, as well as my position in the research process.

> Our work in this city of sculpted exclusion and erasure is meaningful only insofar as we remember that it is marginal. We target this university not because it is some 'global leader' of 'progressive change', but because of its historical complicity in colonial domination.
>
> *Safieh Kabir (2017) – Speech extract from the Decolonisation Rally, 31st October.*

Chapter 2: Studying Decolonisation

In the wake of empires that spanned the world, decolonisation is undoubtably a global concern. Colonial atrocities are all too often framed as things of the past; despite the fact that the legacies of violence and exploitation remain with us today, as do the neo-colonial practices of many contemporary states, corporations and universities. 'Decolonisation' is aimed at overcoming these legacies and practices, yet studying such a vast and varied project is difficult, as Fanon (1963, 36) explains:

> Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: that is to say it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content (Fanon 1963, 36).

Amongst many other crucial contributions, Frantz Fanon argues that decolonisation cannot be understood without taking colonial histories into account.[4] However, these histories are routinely ignored in Britain: recent poll data show that a majority of Britons look favourably on the British empire (YOUGOV 2014; 2016), despite the fact that millions were starved, killed, enslaved, brutalised, violated or detained by the regime (Marshall 2001). Awareness of these histories is not a partisan political project but rather a starting point in addressing historical injustices whose legacies shape the world order and continue to be keenly felt to this day (Wallerstein 2004). That the white British population can afford to ignore these histories is an illustration of their many privileges, not least the privilege of obliviousness (Ferber 2007, 266). It also links to Angela Davis' (2011) assessment that: "We live in a society of an imposed forgetfulness, a society that depends on public amnesia". The recent Windrush scandal provides a keen example of this 'imposed forgetfulness', in

[4] Fanon (1963) is also describes decolonisation as a necessarily violent process of revolutionary armed struggle, a point which is returned to in Chapter 9.

which a generation of commonwealth citizens were written out of British history through the destruction of their landing cards and subsequent threat of deportation (despite the fact they had indefinitely leave to remain under the 1971 Immigration Act). This 'imposed forgetfulness' is also enforced in narratives that emphasise Britain's role in ending the slave trade over its near-300-year involvement (Cameron 2007). Asking what we forget, or what "we learn not to notice" is a feminist question, and an important one, given "so much is reproduced by not being noticed: by receding into the background" (Ahmed 2017, 32; 40). This study is an exercise in noticing what recedes into the background in the university setting, in accordance with what Maclure (2003, 179) calls "deconstructive educational research", which is "a project of resistance to the institutional forgetting that takes place when matters attain the status of common sense". This resistance comes in the form of a "critical consciousness", which Freire (1970, 16) describes as necessary to combat the colonial "culture of silence"; a silence which affects some bodies more than others (Spivak 1988).

There are many examples of deconstructive educational research that present visions for the decolonisation of the university; through searching for non-European paradigms (Alvares and Faruqi 2012), dismantling "epistemic violence" (Heleta 2016), promoting "cognitive justice" (de Sousa Santos 2018), and recognising intersectionalities of race and gender (Mirza 2015). As we will return to at the end of this chapter, my research is most similar to Mirza's (2015) in studying the *process* of decolonisation as it takes place in an institution of higher education.

In relation to Chapter 5 and the decolonisation of knowledge production, the wider literature employs decolonisation in relation to research methodologies (Smith 2012), pedagogies (Wane et al 2004), epistemologies (Sousa Santos 2018) and the curriculum (Joseph 2008; Stein 2016), as well as in specific disciplines; such as English (Chaka et al 2017), Sociology (Alatas and Sinha 2017; Bhambra 2014; Go 2017), Geography (Baldwin 2017; Radcliffe 2017; Roy 2016), Education (Takayama et al 2016; 2017) and International Relations (Zondi 2018), amongst many others. In relation to Chapter 6 and decolonising university spaces, the literature on the unequal experiences and opportunities of black and minority academics is informative (Bhopal 2016; Gabriel and Tate 2017; Mirza 2015). BME academics are rendered "invisible and hypervisible" (Lander and Santoro 2017, 1008), out of place as "space invaders" (Puwar 2004), less able to 'pass' without "white sanction" (Miller 2016), and hence more likely to take "academic flight" (Bhopal et al 2016). This

also manifests in the research process (Rollock 2013), and in diversity work within the academy (Ahmed 2007; 2012). For the most part, these findings are presented as unsurprising given the "institutional racism" within the higher education sector (Bouattia 2015; Bhopal 2018; Pilkington 2013). In this system, Bain (2018, 6) reports that "black students and teachers experience systematic disadvantages compared to their white counterparts on top of the threat or presence of racist name-calling or assault". These disadvantages are comprehensively listed in a pair of reports by the Runneymede Trust (2015a; 2015b): *The School Report: Race Education and Inequality in Contemporary Britain* and *Aiming Higher: Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy*.

In terms of theoretical approach, this paper builds on Broadfoot and Munshi's (2007, 256) use of the "ivory tower" as a symbol within postcolonial critique. The ivory tower is effective in considering the decolonisation of the university as an institution because it is a picture in the public imaginary, which (like empire) is romanticised and mythologised, and all too often allowed to recede into the background. By bringing the ivory tower into the foreground, we make it a site of critique, and show its many flaws in sharper focus. Critical theories (such as feminism, postcolonial theory and critical race theory) are erected like scaffolding up the sides of the ivory tower, and provide the necessary frameworks to bring different features and processes of the tower into view. For example, the feminist scaffold helps us see the phallic design of the tower, its patriarchal structure with many glass ceilings, as well as the sexism, misogyny and fragile masculinity within. The postcolonial scaffold reveals the foundations of the tower in empire, and that the ivory façade is marked by violence, considering how the ivory was obtained. The Critical Race scaffold identifies the ways in which spaces within the tower are regulated and policed by whiteness. Furthermore, the various theoretical scaffolds are connected by intersectional crossbeams, which allow us to bring methodological tools from different scaffolds to bear upon any aspect of the ivory tower. Using the gendered lens from the critical race scaffold shows how the experiences of men and women of colour in the academy diverge in gendered ways. The class scaffold shows how international diversity can still permit elite nationalism, and how significant regional disparities are entrenched in the admissions process. Just as the theoretical scaffolds provide us access and perspective, different methodologies give us the specific tools required for the work of deconstruction.

Let us begin on the standpoint feminist scaffold, guided by Mirza's (2015) consideration of how decolonisation efforts in institutions of higher education intersect with race, gender and class. Her work focusses attention upon the central role of women of colour as the driving force behind the decolonisation movement, and illustrates how "their political actions reflect sophisticated analyses of power" (Hill Collins, in Bassel and Emejulu 2017, xi). In her study, Mirza (2015, 9) identifies ways in which "black and ethnicized women engage in embodied work to decolonize higher education". The phrase '*embodied* work' illustrates that this is a *lived* struggle, which is corroborated by one of the interview participants in this study, Dr Njoki Wamai,[5] who stated: "our lives are decolonising, you know?" (P4). The significance of this utterance should not be overlooked. First, it is a wakeup call to any researcher, that decolonisation is not a "pet academic project" to be theorised and intellectualised, but an "urgent" lived struggle for recognition and even survival (P4). Second, it indicates the necessity of using a standpoint feminist framework, which provides an opportunity to "turn an oppressive feature of the group's conditions into a source of critical insight about how the dominant society thinks and is structured" (Harding 2004, 7).

The source of this knowledge in lived experience means that it exacts an emotional and physical cost, and should therefore be treated respectfully. This practice is in line with Critical Race Theory's primary emphasis on "the recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of colour" (Walker 2005, 132). In this effort, careful reflexive attention is required to avoid reproducing colonial relations, which can easily occur given that: "Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realised" (Smith 2012, 8). This danger means decolonisation research can easily become counterproductive, and so authors must be: "highly reflexive about the contradictions and limitations of their decolonial projects" (Takayama et al 2017, 18). In the methods section that follows (Chapter 3), we turn to the question of how to conduct a study of decolonisation by tapping into grounded knowledge, close to the lived experience, rather than abstract theorising from on high. This involves coming down from the ivory tower to learn about the situation on the ground, as it is experienced by those bodies who are most vulnerable and marginalised. Further effort to constructively position and direct this research can be

[5] Dr Wamai requested not to be anonymised in this research, which is discussed in the *Research Ethics* section of the next chapter (p16).

found in Chapter 4, which considers how decolonisation might be defined at the University of Cambridge.

Chapter 3: Decolonising Methodologies

The methodological approach taken in this dissertation is deeply inspired by Du Bois and Wright's (2002, 5) vision for a "Humanistic Sociology", which is designed in the service of humanity, and asks: "what understandings will ultimately make this world a better place for all people to live in?" Grounding Sociology in human need follows in the original traditions of the discipline, which was dedicated to "social amelioration", rather than the more recent obsession with value neutrality (Du Bois and Wright 2002, 7). In fact, standpoint feminism criticises value neutrality as a political position in itself (Harding 2004), and many of the first sociologists argued that the sociologist should instead "take the side of the underdog" (Becker 1966, 242). Since decolonisation is a project of social amelioration, and the marginalised academic is the underdog in the Cambridge context, the humanistic sociological frame is highly appropriate for this study.

Given the focus on understandings of social amelioration, I believe that an interactionist approach is the most epistemologically appropriate, arguing as it does that our understandings of the social world are created and contested through interactions with others (Blumer 1986; Williams 2008). I opted for Denzin's (2001) *Interpretive Interactionism* over the more widely known symbolic variant, given that it makes specific provisions to combine feminist and critical race theories with participatory action research, which informs the construction of my approach. Building on this epistemological foundation, my methods of data collection were inspired by constructivist grounded theory, which aims first for "intimate familiarity" with the setting through active participation, before honing understandings through interviewing members of the setting (Charmaz 2014, 78). This method is described as being "particularly useful in social justice research projects that address pressing social issues" (Charmaz 2014, 115), given that it provides a detailed insider's perspective on both the problems and solutions as they are identified by those affected.

However, simply documenting different understandings for a better world is not sufficient: rather what is needed is to work towards a "shared agreement" (Du Bois and Wright 2002, 5). I believe that this shared agreement can only arise from democratic dialogue, and to that end, I hope to present the main areas of discussion within the present decolonising movement at the University of Cambridge; to give those already involved the chance to reflect, and those just joining a primer for

these conversations. Just as humanistic sociology is *for* society (Du Bois and Wright 2005), this work of militant sociology is *for* the decolonisation movement.

Militant Research

My approach to combining activism with research was informed by the notion of "militant research" (Elnaiem 2017; Halvorsen 2015, 469), which is designed to facilitate a "process of internal reflection from within particular struggles that seek to map out and discuss underlying antagonisms". I found this focus highly appropriate in light of the contested understandings of decolonisation at Cambridge University. My involvement with the movement began in October 2017 with the Decolonisation Rally (Vignette 1) and ran through to May 2018. During this time, I joined the *Decolonise Sociology* working group; student organising groups Cambridge Defend Education and Cambridge Zero Carbon, and collaborated with the Cambridge University Students' Union BME Campaign. Notable events I attended in this period included decolonisation assemblies run by departments, including: Sociology (31st Oct), English (1st Nov) and History (28th Nov); as well as meetings run by students, including by the BME Campaign (16th Nov), Cambridge Defend Education (29th Jan) and the Critical Theory and Practice group (29th Jan). I also attended several working group sessions: with Sociology (10th Nov, 18th Jan, 26th Jan, 27th April, 11th May, 24th May, 7th June), Politics (12th Feb), History and Philosophy of Science (12th March), Medieval and Modern Languages (25th April) and Social Anthropology (3rd May). I further joined several lectures and educational events including a decolonisation 'teach-out' (5th March), a 'teach-in' (26th March), and a Decolonise Sociology training workshop pilot (14th Feb); as well as rallies for decolonisation (31st Oct), divestment (23rd April) and demilitarisation (30th May). These meetings, seminars and assemblies, in addition to many more informal gatherings and conversations, amounted to over 50 hours of active involvement in the movement, which informed my own understanding of decolonisation at Cambridge, and by extension, the questions asked in the interviews. Data collection in the active participant phase involved taking field notes, which were later explored in "narrative form" as memos, in accordance with grounded theory analysis (Charmaz 2014, 171). The memos that related to emergent conceptual categories were reformulated as vignettes and inserted into the dissertation to help contextualise the analysis and add immersive snapshots of relevant experiences, which Ellis et al (2011) argue can further discussion and facilitate consciousness raising

in the readership. Permission was sought wherever the vignettes identified individuals before inclusion in the final version.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted in two rounds between 27th Feb and 27th April 2018. The sample consisted of ten academics from across ten different departments the University of Cambridge, primarily from the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. These academics were selected on the basis of their involvement in decolonisation initiatives at the university, and held a range of positions, the most common of which was a lectureship. The majority of the sample identified as women of colour.[6] The first round of interviews (n=6) followed an 'intensive' interview style, in which participants were presented with open questions and encouraged to talk at length. Over the course of these interviews, which lasted approximately 50 minutes, I asked an average of eight open questions. In the second round I asked more direct, targeted questions, in accordance with the 'investigative' interview style, which is more interactional and allows both the researcher and the participant to explore ideas and themes through two-sided conversation (Charmaz 2014, 58). Being more focussed these interviews lasted around 30 minutes with an average of 16 questions per interview. Both styles emphasise respect for the participant; validating their humanity and perspective, and providing "affirmation and understanding" (Charmaz 2014, 70). I considered this to be crucial given the topic of this study and the fact that the participant's involvement could be emotionally taxing and even risky in discussing intra- and inter-department relations.

Research Ethics

This research project adhered to the standard ethical concerns of informed consent and data protection (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000: 17), although I deviated slightly from the norm of anonymity due to the fact that one respondent explicitly requested to be named in the study. Dr Njoki Wamai (P4) made the important point that anonymity can be a form of erasure, silencing black and brown voices and denying them proper recognition for their work. I agreed that foregrounding and centring these voices should be the foundation of any decolonial work in the

[6] Since a more detailed breakdown of the sample could compromise participants' anonymity, I chose to I use the broader term 'of colour', despite the fact this obscures differences in ethnicity and experience.

academy. At the same time, other participants required anonymity as a condition for their participation, in part due to fears of repercussions, even for their job security. Hence Dr Wamai's contributions (P4) are identified by name, whilst the other responses (P1-10) remain anonymous to protect the identities of those respondents in positions of greater vulnerability.

My approach followed the maxim that: "Conducting research that is ethical is, above all else, being honest in the negotiation of relations between the researcher and the researched" (Honan et al 2013, 396). In particular, specific attention was required to negotiate power relations and positionality in the interview setting. I was fortunate in that being a student whilst my participants were teachers somewhat disrupted the "interactional power differences" in the interview setting; as well as permitting leadership "by members of the studied group" as respondents retained their positions of academic and institutional authority (Charmaz 2014, 78). The reduction in authority of the interviewer was an advantage in this project as it placed me in the position of the "interested learner", looking to understand a topic that the participant had the experience and expertise to illuminate (Charmaz 2014, 73). Of course, this relation also came with disadvantages, as participants may have chosen to withhold information they would not otherwise have done if the researcher was a peer with similar experiences of working in academia, for personal or professional reasons.

More significant than our positions within the institution were our positionalities, as "differences between interviewer and research respondent in race, class, gender, age and ideologies may affect what happens during the interview" (Charmaz 2014, 77). Bhopal (2016, 52) notes that in her interviews relating to the experiences of BME academics in Higher Education, her positionality as a BME academic enabled participants to speak more openly about their ordeals. As I often did not share identity characteristics with my respondents, I tried earnestly to show my dedication and trustworthiness in conversation with the participant *before* the interview began. In these conversations I would reflect on decolonisation events at which we had both been in attendance, recognise their work and emphasise ideological similarities, and invite participants to ask questions of me and my research, which most did. One interview participant, Dr Njoki Wamai, implored that:

> P: People need to ask questions, and in some cases, for respondents to decide for themselves, actually no, I'm not going to give you anything

I: "because why should I?"

P: Yeah, so you can assess the kind of person that you are dealing with, based on the many questions that you ask them (Wamai, P4).

Dr Wamai's reference above to assessing "the kind of person you are dealing with" (P4) illustrates how the motivation and intentions of the researcher can affect the decision of respondents to participate in a study. Honestly answering such questions helps to build trust, show respect to the participant, and acknowledge that they are expert and that it is their prerogative to share experiential knowledge that came to them at a great emotional (and often physical) price. Because of this toll, it is useful to keep in mind that "learning about research participants' experiences is a privilege" (Charmaz 2014, 70). I made sure to respect this in all my interviews. Hence although my positionality was a barrier, honest negotiation of the interview relation enabled deep and fruitful discussion. In fact, with regards to the interview with Dr Wamai (P4, above), our conversation lasted twice the length of time I initially requested.

Data Analysis

With regards to data analysis, the interviews were fully transcribed with minimal edits for clarity, and then coded using the qualitative data analysis program atlasTI. In the first round of coding, I used the program to conduct a "line by line" analysis, breaking down the data into constituent parts and closely examining the construction of meanings put forward by the interview participants (Charmaz 2014, 113). This process generated 273 open codes, which were then sorted into code groups through a second round of "focused coding" (Charmaz 2014, 141). In this round, the most frequent or significant codes were raised to the status of "emergent categories" (Charmaz 2014, 181), and other codes were assigned to these categories using the *Code Group* tool. I then printed these code groups to allow clustering, sorting and diagramming by hand (Charmaz 2014, 216; Appendix I), through which I was able to establish which categories held the greatest theoretical insight into the meanings awarded to decolonisation: as a critique (intellectual and material), as a movement, and as a dialogue. These meanings became the focus of my analytical chapters (5-8).

Finally, although Charmaz (2014, 147) notes that "initial and focussed coding will suffice for many projects" I opted for one further round of theoretical coding to link my focused codes to existing

theory, allowing me to both better situate and interpret the data used in my analysis sections. Despite this, the structure of the dissertation remains determined by the focused code data, ensuring that I am describing the situation at Cambridge, rather than existing theory. Following my analysis, I opted for a final round of "member checking", in which I presented my interview participants with a draft of the dissertation to ensure their quotes were in context and sufficiently anonymous (Charmaz 2014, 111). This gesture was appreciated by respondents and led to several edits in the final version.

Before diving into the substantive analysis referred to above, the next chapter provides some crucial context to the task of defining decolonisation at Cambridge, to ensure that this study remains "highly reflexive" about the various pitfalls that face decolonial projects (Takayama et al 2017, 18).

> the emerging consensus is that our institutions must undergo a process of *decolonization* both of knowledge and of the university as an institution. The task before us is to give content to this call – which requires that we be clear about what we are talking about (Mbembe 2015).

Chapter 4: Defining Decolonisation

Defining decolonisation at Cambridge is difficult because there is a great deal of variation in what it means for different actors (students, staff, members of faculty), across different positionalities (gender, 'race', class and so on) as well as at different levels (for the university as an institution, as well as the many colleges and departments). In the pursuit of clarity, we must tread a fine line between illegibility and institutional co-option (Spivak 1992). On one hand, it is important for the movement to be able to define and communicate its aims, which was identified by one participant as being particularly difficult:

> it is really hard to define and I think it operates on lots of scales and can get articulated in a number of different ways [...] one of the difficulties of the Decolonising Cambridge movement has been to set up all the different ways that we're thinking about decolonisation (P3).

On the other hand, an overly simplistic definition that could easily be co-opted, as another participant warned:

> there's a danger in the way that the discourse is developing around decolonisation, that it's becoming a bit of a buzzword, that becomes very easy to be appropriated like multiculturalism (P8).

Institutional co-option speaks to the way that decolonisation could be appropriated into university structures; in a similar way to how multiculturalism has been reduced to superficial "tick box" diversity and equality initiatives (Ahmed 2007, 595). Participants described decolonisation as "an ongoing process, it isn't a fixed point where you can check the box" (P9). Exploring the different meanings participants awarded to decolonisation, whilst retaining their nuances should help us to tread the fine line between illegibility and co-option. Context is also key. Asking a brief *when*, *where*, *who,* and *what* of decolonisation can help us to find our place in these discussions, as well as identifying a few more potential pitfalls to avoid.

Asking *when* decolonisation takes place evokes the many 'historical processes' of decolonisation (Fanon 1963, 36), as well as recognising the specificities of the present time; taking heed of Mbembe's (2016, 37) warning "that we might be fighting battles of the present and the future with outdated tools". Thinking about the decolonisation of Cambridge temporally, we see how "it is an institution that is so steeped in and made in a colonial past" (Wamai, P4), as well as its ongoing involvement in neo-colonial violence (Chapter 6). Asking *where* decolonisation takes place marks the importance of geographical context, as although we might agree on one definition of decolonisation at Cambridge:

> It's not what decolonisation means if you're sitting on land that has been appropriated by a corporation, it's not what decolonisation means if you live in a chronically impoverished community that is dealing with the legacies of slavery and colonialism (P5).

The next question is, if decolonisation has "so many meanings for different people" (P9), whose account do we start with? One participant reflected that:

> decolonising Cambridge is so complex [...] but it needs to start from those populations of students who are most marginalised, most uncomfortable in Cambridge, and what (in terms of their imaginaries) Cambridge should be for them. I think that's where we need to start (Wamai, P4).

In beginning with marginalised viewpoints, we avoid the danger of decolonisation becoming co-opted by hegemonic discourses (Spivak 2008). However, we must also be careful not to essentialise marginalised groups or treat them as monolithic blocs, which is a danger when using the BME category. One participant argued that this category "muddies the water" in the sense that "it lumps together a whole range of different historical oppressions under one label" (P6). Another interview participant explained this phenomenon:

> a lot of students of colour in the faculty who aren't American but are from Africa or South Asia, [are] saying that actually our experiences of colonisation are very different and very specific, and our experience of anti-colonial politics or postcolonial politics are also very different to the civil rights movement (P3).

As well as obscuring specificities in historical oppressions, if the BME label is "used in a very uncritical manner" (P6), it also erases significant differences between minority groups' experience of

Cambridge. For example, in 2010-11, the average success rate for a BME applicant was 24.1%, compared to 29.8% for white applicants (Equality and Diversity Report 2011/12). However, disaggregating the BME category showed that success rates by ethnicity varied from 7.1% to 31.9%; so whilst certain minority groups actually had a higher success rate than white applicants, some groups' rates were more than *four times lower* (Appendix II). Freedom of information requests from Labour MP David Lammy (2017) revealed that only 1.5% of Oxbridge admissions offers were awarded to black British candidates in 2015; and the University's own equality data show that only 0.6% of Cambridge staff identify as Black British, compared to a total of 11.8% BME staff (Equality and Diversity Report 2015/16). These disparities show that rather than lumping experiences together, we must remain attentive to significant differences between and within minority groups – also by gender, religion, sexuality or class – all of which affect people of colour in different ways. As one participant put it:

> at Cambridge decolonisation comes with being critical to issues relating to class and gender, it's not just about race (P1).

This intersectional and historically specific approach will ensure that a plurality of voices are heard within decolonisation movements, and allow genuine solidarity to arise from the recognition rather than the rejection of difference. A serious pitfall in this instance is if some voices try to speak over others:

> I know there have also been furious debates between some white scholars and some scholars of colour saying: "Who are you to stand there and lead the movement? We've been doing this, nobody came and rewarded us, but now you want to take the credit" (Wamai, P4).

This links to the question of who has the authority to say what decolonisation is or is not. This study recognises that for a white scholar to claim one definition over and above the understandings of people of colour from former colonies, many of whom fought and all of whom live with the legacies of colonialism, would be both intellectually and morally questionable. One white participant voiced such a concern, stating of decolonisation: "I'm very reluctant to say what it is" (P9). Another participant of colour criticised the careerism within the decolonisation movement:

> P: when the decolonise movement came into town, everybody jumped on the bandwagon, and so it was one of those challenging points when you say, wait a minute, I've been doing this-
>
> I: -the whole time.
>
> P: The only reason you're doing this is you're looking for [recognition], it's a career move, and it's not fair. And so for me, first even those conversations need to be had, and I'm glad you're writing about it because people need to know (Wamai, P4).

The critique was levelled against white scholars who "make it their new pet academic project", but are not invested to the same extent as marginalised people in the university: "they don't live it like us" (Wamai, P4). Participants also warned against (over)intellectualizing the issue: "we can't just be in this ivory tower theorising and not linking it to change and people who are on the ground doing work" (P3). There is a real danger that in doing so, we lose sight of the fact that decolonisation is an "urgent" struggle, as another stated: "it's about the epistemic violence that many of us face every day" (Wamai, P4).

Remaining wary of potential pitfalls, and cognisant of the particular context, I now turn to the primary research question: *what* does decolonisation mean for Cambridge University? This is a difficult question to answer, as even within the interview sample, there are different agendas and scopes for the project of decolonising the curriculum and the university. For some participants, the scope of the decolonisation project is focussed solely on what is meant by decolonising the curriculum "in very practical terms" (P6). For others, there is a broad set of connected demands, and decolonisation is an attempt to "bring all this stuff together under one umbrella" (P8). As with all social movements, setting the agenda is "one of the places where the debate comes in" (P10). To best understand this debate, and hence the variety of meanings awarded to decolonisation at Cambridge, I believe it is most useful to consider the broadest scope that space will allow. At its widest reach, one participant argues that: "decolonisation as a reality and as a metaphor is really about intersecting axes of justice" (P5). This broader understanding of decolonisation as *justice* necessitates a focus wider than the curriculum (and even the university), which another participant observed:

> I mean there are different voices for decolonisation, there are some people who do want to connect it to questions of racial justice and social justice, and you can really see that with the students, that's

> very clear, that to decolonise means to support the women in Yarls Wood, and to talk about racism happening every day here at Cambridge (P8).

In this way, “decolonisation” is providing a conceptual frame and a space to draw “connections between very diverse politics and agendas” (P9). Drawing connections between different justice concerns and linking them to the “everyday level” (Wamai, P4) was a focus of decolonisation work during the UCU strike action (February/March 2018), of which one participant reflected:

> this happened with the pensions strike, it was about way more than just the pensions, you know we had a racial injustice and antiracism day, a feminist fallout of pension cuts, we started to stitch together the fact that austerity, racism, class injustice, the fake deficit, university governance, the managerialism of senior management, all these things are connected (P8).

These wide-ranging and interconnected critiques are at the heart of the movement to decolonise Cambridge. Of course, as noted by participant 8 (above), we must keep in mind that decolonisation “doesn’t necessarily mean the same for everybody, and that’s just something that’s going to be the case” (P8). However, in the interests of discussion and debate, and as a precursor to the substantive chapters to come, what is on the decolonisation agenda at Cambridge?

As an academic project, the decolonisation agenda focusses upon the content of curricula and disciplinary canons. Critical questions are asked of what content is taught in lectures and supervisions, as well as pedagogy, examinations and research. Proponents of decolonisation assert that if Cambridge is to live up to its offer of providing a rigorous intellectual experience, then it cannot offer a narrow, euro- and ethnocentric programme characterised by whiteness and white ignorance. Nor can it overburden and entrap its minority staff in diversity work to the detriment of their academic careers. As a material project, decolonisation challenges the ongoing effects of colonial legacies; arguing against continuing disparities in student and staff experiences based on gender, class, ‘race’ and other identity characteristics, particularly in terms of access, hiring, promotions, institutional culture and spaces. as well as challenging the glorification of colonial figures in colleges and departments. Student activist groups have used the banner of decolonisation to challenge the university’s neo-colonial practices of marketisation and militarisation; such as the exploitation of academic and non-academic staff through austerity measures and audit culture, the increased casualisation of labour, the treatment of students as consumers, and their surveillance

through the *Prevent* duty, as well as the use of state-sanctioned violence in the forcible removal of peaceful student protestors. The university has been further criticised for research partnerships and financial involvement in the arms trade and fossil fuels industry.

These agenda points relate to the investigation of decolonisation as an intellectual and a material *critique*, which are the foci of Chapters 5 and 6 respectively. Although the intellectual/material distinction is convenient, it is also arbitrary, as one participant noted: "I also don't think it's the case of discursive vs material, I think the two have to be brought into dialogue" (P5). Hence the central importance of *dialogue* to the decolonising project is considered in Chapter 8, after it is described as a *movement* (Chapter 7).

> Another site of decolonization is the university classroom. We cannot keep teaching the way we have always taught (Mbembe 2015).

Chapter 5: Decolonising the Curriculum

The best-known aspect of the decolonisation movement at Cambridge is the idea of "decolonising the curriculum", in part due to the CRASSH (2016) seminar series of the same name (P10), as well as following the media fallout from the open letter to the English department (P6). In this chapter we consider the meanings attached by participants to decolonisation as an "intellectual project" (P1; P4; P6; P10), characterised by the following:

> the question of decolonisation has under its umbrella an intellectual question about the curriculum, and what we ought to be teaching students (P6).

In the first section, I relay the importance awarded by participants to *critical awareness*; presenting decolonisation as involving a rigorous critique of structures and relations power. I then explore how this critique plays out on a structural level, considering how power is embedded in the process of knowledge production, and how this manifests in the curriculum. I next turn to the personal level, and the way individuals are both impacted by and can themselves reproduce these power relations. Finally, I present the progress made thus far in decolonising the curriculum.

Decolonisation as Critical Awareness (of Power)

One of the most populous code groups to arise from the interview data was that of *critical awareness* (n=28),[7] aptly characterised by one participant as follows: "I think having a critical mind is the epicentre of the decolonising movement" (P1). This critical awareness was linked to being *reflexive* (n=20) and *intersectional* (n=13), drawing *connections* (n=12), as well as bringing *academic rigour* (n=16). Most emphatically, decolonisation as *critical awareness* was linked to critiques of *power* (n=39):

[7] The shorthand '(n=28)' refers to 28 codes within the *critical awareness* code group. An individual code consists of quoted interview data, like the example given in the same sentence above.

> To me the question is: "What tools does decolonisation give us to understand how power works? What kind of conceptual intellectual tools does it give us to really understand these mechanics of power?" If it doesn't, if it's just like one of these cool things to say "I wanna [decolonise]", that's fine, but let's be serious about it (P8).

Here the participant presents a serious critique of *power* as the distinction between decolonisation as a serious intellectual project and decolonisation as just "one of these cool things to say" (P8). Another participant noted that awareness of power relations was core to the decolonising project:

> the critical mind cannot be achieved if we don't make students or scholars (or even professors) aware of the larger power mechanisms in play. That's the kind of mistake we seem to be addressing constantly, that's why we're having so much difficulty in explaining what decolonisation is about. Because it's almost as if we are talking to certain minds who have failed to address power mechanisms (P1).

The "critical mind" (P1) is therefore both an aim and a requirement of decolonisation; both enabling further critique of power structures, as well as depending on an awareness of them. Since the beginning of the decolonisation movement at Cambridge, students have identified the reproductive power that lies in the composition of the curriculum. The Cambridge University Students' Union (CUSU) Women's Officer, Lola Olufemi, stated:

> Myself and countless others have written at length about the ways in which a white curriculum is nothing more than the maintenance of structural and epistemological power (Olufemi, Varsity 21st June 2017).

In these next sections I follow their lead, identifying and communicating power mechanisms at a structural level within processes of knowledge production, as well as how they impact on a personal level in the reproduction of both the "master narrative" (Broadfoot and Munshi (2007, 256) and "white ignorance" (P3; Mills 2003).

Decolonising Knowledge Production

Critiquing processes of knowledge production within the university means asking which perspectives are reinforced or challenged through what is studied, taught, published, and cited. At the first Decolonise Sociology meeting, a senior member of faculty asked the staff present: "what are

we reproducing, and for whom?" (31st Oct 2017). Every interview participant noted the legacy of colonial knowledges in the contemporary curriculum (P1-10); in one faculty, it was noted that "the Tripos has been in its current form since the 1960s, and the Tripos itself was invented in the late 19th century" (P6). As a result, curricula perpetuate "the same old long-term assumptions" (P8) about what the purpose of a given discipline is, which knowledges should be considered canonical, and (implicitly) which worldviews and perspectives should be reproduced. Those perspectives that get reproduced tend to be the ones that "reinforce systems of domination, of imperialism, racism, sexism or class elitism" (hooks 2003, xiv), due to the lack of diversity and reflexivity in the curriculum (P1-10). The reproduction of these systems is eased by their being 'backgrounded' or located in the past, with those who feel the present-day impacts of these systems being told to 'get over it' (Ahmed 2012). For example, the racial erasure in reading lists is not interpreted as such, corroborating the argument that in a 'colour-blind' society, many white people "do not interpret their racial isolation and segregation from blacks as racial" (Bonilla-Silva 2017, 105). Rather, appeals to 'meritocracy' or 'freedom' are used to support claims that authors should not be included solely on the basis of their skin colour (an argument against tokenism), or that students should not be forced to read authors they do not want to (an argument against diversity). Both arguments collapse under scrutiny, as decolonising the curriculum is against tokenism, and the inclusion of critical scholars who are fundamental to the discipline is clearly necessary. In Sociology, for example, decolonisation would entail recognising the erasure of the key contributions of black scholars to the discipline (Du Bois and Wright 2002); such as how Du Bois founded the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory 20 years before the 'first' Chicago School of Sociology (Wright 2002). These erasures are nothing new: Durkheim, Marx and Weber are often cited as the 'founders' of the discipline, even though the earliest sociological studies can be traced back to Ibn Khaldun's original work in 1377 (almost 500 years before Weber was born). Similarly, the first ethnography was conducted by Al-Biruni in India in 1017, over 800 years before 'modern' anthropology was born (P1). Stein (2017, 44) argues that erasing the contributions of scholars of colour and overemphasising the importance of European scholars (within 'disciplinary' knowledge) is an exercise in "Euro-supremacism". Rudolph et al (2018, 35) decry the "invention of a disciplinary past that overlooks the colonial and racialising practices that have contributed to their power." Of this power, or 'epistemic privilege', Grosfugel (2013, 74) asks:

> How is it possible that the canon of thought in all the disciplines of the Social Sciences and Humanities in the *Westernized university* (Grosfoguel 2012) is based on the knowledge produced by a few men from five countries in Western Europe (Italy, France, England, Germany and the USA)? How is it possible that men from these five countries achieved such an epistemic privilege to the point that their knowledge today is considered superior over the knowledge of the rest of the world? How did they come to monopolize the authority of knowledge in the world?

The answer is found in a colonial project in which the domination of land and people also required a domination of knowledge. Sousa Santos (2010) coined the term "epistemicide" to describe the extermination of knowledge and ways of knowing, just as a genocide destroys a people. Grosfugel (2013) notes that epistemicides and genocides occurred concurrently under colonial regimes, and identifies four such instances in the conquests of Al-Andalus and the Americas, the enslavement of Africans, and the murder of millions of women in Europe as 'witches'. In each of these cases, knowledge systems that competed with the dominant colonial narratives were destroyed – from the 13th Century library of Cordoba, with a collection 500 times the size of any in Europe, to the indigenous codices and wealth of women's 'folklore' knowledge – all were burned (Grosfugel 2013, 80). Without competitors, it was possible for colonial regimes to "monopolize the authority of knowledge in the world" (Grosfugel 2013, 74). As a result, Rudolph et al (2018, 34) argue that "there is no way that disciplinary knowledge can escape its enduring connections to colonialism".

Reproducing the Master Narrative

These enduring connections to colonialism have a destructive personal impact, as one participant described facing "epistemic violence every day", and not just them but "many of us" (Wamai, P4). Zondi (2018, 19) describes epistemic violence as a great injustice:

> The ability of Eurocentrism to police thoughts of others, decide who is rational and not, who is publishable or not, whose work can be passed or failed, is one of the worst forms of injustice.

Within the university, this influence is pervasive (Puwar 2004; Bhopal 2016; Gabriel and Tate 2017). Broadfoot and Munshi (2007, 256) argue that "the ivory tower of reason, rationality and rigid structures colonises the world of lived experience", with the result that minority voices are pressured into "echoing the sanitised tone of the master narrative". I heard this time and time again in open meetings during my fieldwork, from staff and students alike. Students described essay advice they

had received to "write like a white man", or voiced their concerns that they would be penalised for including "subjective" topics of race, gender and ethnicity in their exams or supervisions (1st Nov 2017). Postdocs agreed that in research and job applications they adopted the "professional" tone of the "white male middle class" (31st Oct 2017), and staff described the pressure to "whiten their minds" to conform to Western academic standards (3rd May 2018) in the face of racism in the research process (Rollock 2013). This is a deeply insidious and unjust process, with the potential result that "Colonialism inherently gives colonized intellectuals an intellectual inferiority complex" (Fanon 1968; Rabaka 2011, 131). In the face of these pressures, the variety of voices remains suppressed, and the university environment reproduces the intellectual hegemony of the white Western perspective. Far from being an accidental or natural process, Bunting (2004 52) argues that the university is "designed to entrench the power and privilege of the ruling white majority", and hence we might think of the ivory tower as a "colonial outpost" (Heleta 2012, 2).

Challenging White Ignorance

The epistemic erasure within disciplinary knowledge and the pressures to conform to the master narrative result in an "exclusive entrenchment in one system of thought [which] impoverishes us all" (Wane et al 2004, 509). This system of thought, described by Mills (2007: 45) as "white ignorance", shields academics from the racial realities on the ground. The notion of the ivory tower evokes a wilful ignorance, as: "To live or be in an ivory tower is not to know about or to want to avoid the ordinary and unpleasant things that happen in people's lives" (Cambridge English Dictionary 2018). Part of this aversion stems from the perceived need to be 'objective', and hence not to get caught up in what is seen as subjective or political. The myth of the 'neutral' researcher is based on a denial of subjectivity of the researcher and an appeal to the 'objective' perspective gained from the tower. As Broadfoot and Munshi (2007, 256) put it: "in forsaking the voice of the heart, they are communicatively defending the imaginary ivory tower". The authors describe subjectivity as a disruptive force that "shakes institutional academics from their lofty perch high above the real world and forces them to confront life" (Broadfoot and Munshi 2007, 256). Decolonisation makes precisely this challenge, as forwarded by one interview participant:

> P: We should accept the fact that objectivity is-

> I: impossible-
>
> P: bullshit, and actually such bullshit that it makes us blind to the subjective position that we comfortably take (P1).

The participant's appeal to comfort here is important, as although many are comfortable in their positionality, being accepted in the space of the ivory tower, another participant notes:

> in the university context of research and teaching, decolonising means thinking about how some of our platitudes and comfortable presumptions are in fact perpetuating a certain sort of violence against certain groups, either nearby or further afield (P9).

This relates to the fact that "scholarly practices engage in reproducing intellectual domination" (Broadfoot and Munshi 2007, 254), and as another interview participant notes: "we ourselves are a part of this production of white ignorance" (P3). If left unchallenged, the colonial presumptions canonised in modern academic disciplines lead many scholars to reproduce that epistemic violence in their own work, given "the legacy of knowledges that make us blindly complicit in perpetuating wrongs" (Oliveira Andreotti (2012, 23). Decolonisation issues a "challenge to those previously unrecognised things" (P9), such as "the notion that we are authority figures on everything" (P3), requiring instead that we "approach our work with much more humility" (P3). Hence there are several sources for discomfort when academics are shaken down from the ivory tower; from acknowledging one's own ignorance (and role in reproducing ignorance), to the loss of authority and potential humiliation of this newfound position of humility. In increasing awareness of one's own subjectivity, there is also discomfort in the recognition of difference, as Lorde (1984, 115-6) states: "as long as any difference between us means one of us must be inferior, then the recognition of any difference must be fraught with guilt". In recognising privilege and being required to challenge that privilege, one participant stated: "I understand it's painful" (Wamai, P4). However, despite this uncomfortableness, reflexivity is necessary both for good scholarship (P1) and for empathy and alliance (P3).

In discussing reflexivity, we must also consider the varying burden of reflexivity across different bodies, as one panellist at speaker at a *Decolonising Development Studies* seminar stated that "reflexivity hurts" (17th May 2018). This was made particularly visible to me at a reading group

discussion of Frantz Fanon's "Black Skin, White Masks" ([1952] 1967), in which a visibly shaken and subdued lecturer of colour described their experience of the reading the book as "retraumatising". On several other occasions, engaging in reflexivity caused panellists and speakers of colour to break down, such was the emotional impact of the experiences they were describing. I was twice moved to tears by these public displays of both vulnerability and strength, although I recognise that my empathic response was of a different order to the pain experienced as a direct result of the racism being described. Hence, in recognising these unequal emotional burdens, we must remember not to fall into a "one-size-fits-all" (P10) approach. Similar arguments can be found in the academic literature, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018, 168-9) describes the project of "self-reflexivity" as having different foci in the global North as opposed to the global South. For example, Rudolph et al (2018, 22) argue that it is a specific "historical reflexivity" that is needed to "redress the exclusions of non-White histories, ideas and experiences in the formation of academic knowledge". A sensitive project of developing reflexivity would be part of decolonising our minds (wa Thiong'o 1986), overcoming internalised oppression (David 2013; Fanon 1968) and helping to redevelop our common humanity (Freire 1968). In this way, decolonisation can be framed as "human liberation" (wa Thiong'o 1986, 108), unlocking awareness of ourselves, our positionality, and the differences between us, and "using human difference as a springboard for creative change within our lives" (Lorde 1984, 115-6).

Progress in Decolonising the Curriculum

In line with Lorde's (1984) vision of difference as creative; decolonisation efforts seek intellectual inspiration from "different perspectives" (P8). According to Takayama et al (2016, 18), decolonisation initiatives require departments to "take seriously the intellectual work and theoretical insights generated in peripheral regions around decolonial struggles over knowledge". Two interview participants described the History department as taking the lead in this regard:

> I was at the History faculty discussion [and] they were there discussing the kind of intellectual arguments, historical arguments for taking the project seriously (P3).

> I think it was very very helpful for History to attempt to decolonise their own curriculum, giving the implication or signal that it is actually an important intellectual project, rather than this fringe issue (P1).

In addition to signals from departments, student demand for more diverse topics has also provided pressure for curriculum change:

> Student demands, combined with the departments concerns; financial concerns etc, have enabled certain scholars at the department to drag their projects into the core (P1).

Participants described how students demanded both a range of more diverse topics, but also "to have workshops around how to do research in a decolonial way" (P9), recognizing that aspects of data collection in the social sciences, such as fieldwork, are historically colonial practices (Smith 2012). As such, decolonisation becomes about improving the quality of scholarship and developing academic rigour, by moving beyond the "systematic ignorance" produced by "racist, Eurocentric and heterosexist conceptual frameworks" (Harding 2004, 5). In the construction of the curriculum, some interview participants were optimistic about the progress that could be made:

> thinking about our curriculum and our forms of knowledge production, that is within our realms of [control], we can just go and do that (P3).

However, this varied by department, one participant for example suggested that disciplines with an established canon may be less open to change (P6). Similarly, participants identified the need for a "willingness" (P5) to change curricula, and this was not seen as something that could be enforced:

> I can't demand that everyone teaching on the core course must have a decolonised curriculum, people would be like "no I'm going to teach what I teach" (P10).

Another participant described their strategic approach to raising the decolonisation agenda so as not to come across as "on the attack" (P2). They attempted to meet lecturers at their level, encouraging them to think about how "perhaps I haven't changed my course in 10 years" (P2). Other interview participants problematised the notion of a 'decolonised curriculum', arguing that thinking of a reading list as 'decolonised' just because it has critical, postcolonial or decolonial authors is erroneous:

> I: Would you describe the papers you teach as 'decolonised' papers?
>
> P: No, not at all. I think that we raise this issue for students, and the responses were phenomenal, it's been really very interesting, but to say that it meets some criteria that then get it labelled as a

> decolonial thing is wrong. I think decolonisation [...] it is an ongoing process, it isn't a fixed point where you can check the box (P9).

This response emphasises the fact that beyond the 'end goal' of changing reading lists, decolonisation of higher education (as an intellectual project) is a process that requires "ongoing reflexivity" (P3) and "constant critique" (P1). In the next chapter, we turn this critique to the university itself, to explore how power is embedded in Cambridge as an institution.

Vignette 2: Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge (17th October 2017)

> Professor Shirley Tate is presenting her soon-to-be-published book on the experiences of women of colour in academia: *Inside the Ivory Tower*. She tells an anecdote from her own experience, when she was asked as part of a 'diversity and inclusion' initiative if there was any racism in the school in which she worked. People around me in the lecture room start laughing and murmuring knowingly. At first I'm taken aback – it's like I missed the punchline to a joke everyone knows – but I soon learn the response is elicited from the ignorance of the question. Because Tate's reply is: "Sociology 101, we live in a racist society. Why would this school be any different?" There is absolute understanding and agreement from the people of colour in the room. And behind their smiles, surely, there is also anger at the injustice and hypocrisy of an educational system that claims to be tolerant and meritocratic. I'm shocked into awareness. I want to get on board.

Chapter 6: Decolonising the University

Having detailed the need for a "critical gaze" (P1) in Chapter 5, we now turn that gaze to the university itself. When we look inside the ivory tower, we see that "the university is not a pure space" (P5), but rather it plays a role in "perpetuating a certain sort of violence against certain groups, either nearby or further afield" (P9). This chapter considers decolonisation in the wider context of the university as an "institution" (P3; P4; P5; P6; P10), looking at the impacts of (neo)colonial legacies (most prominently 'race', class and gender) upon bodies and environments both at home and abroad. In this broader understanding, the project is to decolonise university spaces; enabling people who are marginalised to both survive and thrive, as well as opposing the university's involvement in neo-colonial violence in the arms trade and fossil fuel industries. As always, obstacles to this project include the 'sanctioned ignorance' that leads academics to seclude themselves in the ivory tower and abdicate responsibility.

Decolonising the University means Liberating University Spaces

Colonial regimes depended upon the enforcement of social categories (such as 'race', gender and class) for their divide and rule strategies of social control (Said 1978). In buying in to these categories, and reproducing the relations of power between them; the racism, sexism and class discrimination

that takes place at Cambridge can be seen as part of a "colonial hangover" (Wamai, P4). Shockingly, the Big Cambridge Survey unveiled that 48% of BME respondents had been affected by racial prejudice in their time at Cambridge (BCS 2016-17). This statistic is less surprising if one considers that: "The university is racist in a racist society" (P2), in line with Critical Race Theory, which posits that rather that rare occurrences of violence, racism is an everyday, structural feature of society (Bonilla-Silva 2015). Hence for one participant, decolonisation becomes a question of "how do we make the BME student experience worthwhile, because those are the people who are most affected by this institution" (Wamai, P4). Another agreed that: "starting with racism at a place like this is a perfectly good place to start" (P10). Wherever one starts, the need for a wider approach was emphasised by one participant, who stated that: "at Cambridge decolonisation comes with being critical to issues relating to class and gender, it's not just about race" (P1). This broader approach reflects the fact that: "anyone who is not the mainstream – western or American, white, [middle] class – finds Cambridge a very difficult place to engage in" (Wamai, P4). Furthermore, these disparities affect members of faculty as well as students:

> I hate the phrase "student experience",[8] but it is the case that as a minority woman, either at the faculty or at the undergraduate level, there are certain challenges that an institution like Cambridge is really ill-equipped to deal with (P6).

One such challenge is sexual harassment and assault, as in 2014, a CUSU survey found 77% of students had experienced sexual harassment whilst at the University of Cambridge. Unsurprisingly, institutional racism and sexism have a strongly negative effect on feelings of belonging at Cambridge, which was described by one participant as "a very white male environment" (P1). Another added:

> we need to decolonise, so that the student experience is for everybody, so that people can feel they belong here, as right now people don't feel like they belong here, the only people that belong here are those boys (and girls, but mainly white boys) who do their undergraduate, masters and then PhDs in Cambridge, and most of the time they're the only ones who get the postdocs and JRFs [junior research fellowships] (Wamai, P4).

[8] A notion which was challenged in speeches and discussions on several occasions during the strike period, being linked to the commodification and marketisation of higher education.

This white male environment is often simply experienced as 'welcoming' by white men, rather than being understood as gendered or racialised. My own awareness of this was raised when describing to one interview participant what I thought was an inclusive dining hall environment:

> I: yeah and the other thing you can just go and sit down next to anyone, and not be afraid to start a conversation and they will talk to you
>
> P: But does it happen to everybody? You know you're a white person (Wamai, P4).

In fact, this participant informed me that only three out of the fifteen or twenty black students at their college would go to the dining hall:

> P: And I would ask them, "how come you're never in the dining hall?" and they'd tell me "no, it's so scary, it's so intimidating, how can you be the only black person, how do you cope?" (Wamai, P4).

Academics of colour described a similar experience of college dining, although rather than being intimidated they described being irritated and even offended by certain peers, and as such would attend halls very rarely if at all (P5; P8). Feelings of exclusion were matched by frustration that the expectation is entirely on the person of colour to prove that they fit in (to a space that they may not even like, given its hostility), whereas there is no expectation for white people to meet them in the middle: "because this is the default, this is their space" (Wamai, P4). The need to manage one's behaviour or appearance to fit into the academy is described as "institutional passing" by Ahmed (2012) and is required to navigate not just social spaces but academic ones as well. Rollock (2013) argue that in order to get research published, people of colour are forced to adopt western styles of thinking and writing. This process was described by one faculty member at a decolonisation assembly as "academicized racism – rendering white the way one thinks" (3rd May 2018). These findings broadly confirm several authoritative contributions in the existing literature regarding the experiences of minority groups in higher education (Puwar 2004; Ahmed 2012; Bhopal 2016; Gabriel and Tate 2017). To liberate university spaces, then, decolonisation is a project of ensuring all belong equally, all are welcome, and all make an effort to be accommodating. This is particularly important given the fact that complaints are sometimes swept away by assertions that minority groups have nothing to complain about because it's a privilege to be at Cambridge and they should

be grateful. Rather the opposite is true; which is that both the university and the profession are enriched by students and academics of colour (P2).

Decolonising the University means Critiquing Material Complicities

Several participants argued that for decolonisation to move "beyond the vogue" (Wamai, P4), it must link to a material critique: "There is a sense in which there has to be more active confrontation of colonial-modern legacies" (P9). One participant suggested that these legacies are still identifiable:

> Cambridge played a very specific role in British Colonialism, and there are certain legacies of very literal colonialism that one can still identify (P10).

These legacies are still physically apparent at the University of Cambridge; in artefacts such as the Gweagal spears, taken by Captain Cook in 1770 and held in the museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, and in the Benin Bronze Cockerel, which remains on display in Jesus College. Furthermore, the money from colonialism helped to build certain colleges and libraries, some of which still bear those names and legacies. For example, a bust of Jan Smuts, the architect of apartheid in South Africa (Harvey 2001),[9] is displayed prominently in the dining hall at Christs College. Churchill College unsurprisingly features Churchill, who is accused of holding a deeply racist hatred of the "primitive uncivilised people" of India, and of playing an administrative role in the deaths of over three million people in the 1943-5 Bengal Famine (Mukerjee 2010). These reminders of historical injustices are a cause of pain and humiliation for many students and staff, and beyond the physical history at Cambridge is the "historical complicity in colonial domination" (Kabir 2017, 1).

In addition to historical complicity, students also levelled critiques against contemporary forms of neo-colonial violence perpetuated by the university. Perhaps the most prominent and public example of these critiques occurred on the 16th March 2018, when over 500 staff and students attended a 90-minute Q&A session with the Vice Chancellor of the University of Cambridge. The session was arranged in response to the demands of a group of student activists who occupied the University's administrative centre in the midst of the UCU Pension strikes, in protest against the

[9] "Instead of mixing up black and white in the old haphazard way, which instead of lifting up the black degraded the white, we are now trying to lay down a policy of keeping them apart as much as possible in our institutions" (Jan Smuts [London 1917]; in Harvey 2001, 36).

"marketisation of education" and in solidarity with striking staff. The students ended their five-day occupation victoriously when this demand for an open meeting was met by the Vice Chancellor, Stephen Toope.

The questions asked at the Q&A were described by one participant as important to the project of decolonisation:

> the questions that were asked the other day at the meeting with the VC about disinvestment, about working with BAE systems, I mean the university is not a pure space, and it has very material complicities with dispossession and disenfranchisement, so asking those questions alongside curricula questions is important I think (P5).

These challenging questions were applauded and even cheered by those gathered, covering areas such as the Department of Engineering's research partnerships with BAE, which was linked through arms trade to the Turkish bombing of Afrin; the *Prevent* duty as a "a threat to our civil liberties, freedom of speech and expression", as well as the divestment of University funds from fossil fuels industries (Varsity, March 16th 2018). These questions expand the scope of decolonisation from a 'liberated curriculum' to a socially responsible university, as one respondent noted:

> it is no good to talk about decolonisation if you're not also going to talk about the implication of the university in arms research or drone attacks or climate change and so forth. It's no good because all these things are destroying livelihoods (P8).

This argument links to the idea that "the decolonisation of the university cannot be disconnected from the larger struggle to decolonise society" (Maldonado-Torres 2016, 31). In fact, if decolonisation efforts focus solely on the needs of Cambridge students, one participant warns that we are in danger of "doing something profoundly selfish" (P8):

> If you consider that the majority of the world's population, the poor especially, are excluded from these [academic] institutions, what we're talking about really is what is the material consequences of not just colonisation but contemporary forms of imperialism (P8).

Here the participant asks who the real target of decolonisation initiatives should be. Parallels can be drawn between their mention of the global 'poor' and Fanon's "Wretched of the Earth" (1963). Since contemporary forms of imperialism lock many bodies out of Cambridge University, or even

education as a whole, should an updated curriculum at Cambridge really be the focus of decolonisation efforts? For Mbembe (2016, 38): "We cannot be oblivious to the power relations in global higher education and the interplay between core and peripheral nations in higher education". Tuck and Yang (2012, 21) strongly argue that "Decolonization is not a metonym for social justice", but rather "specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life". It is clear that decolonisation initiatives at Cambridge do not meet meet Tuck and Yang's standard, although one participant did refer to the question of reparations:

> where did this place get its money from? [...] If we're thinking about arguments about reparations seriously, then this institution has a huge role to play (P3).

Although discussions about reparations will be difficult, this participant noted that "I do feel as academics that we have a moral obligation to address this" (P3). Raising these difficult questions will require the creation of spaces for "deep honest inquiry" (Wamai, P4), which links to the idea of decolonisation as a dialogue (Chapter 8). Before doing so, Chapter 7 considers the meanings awarded to decolonisation at a movement.

> when we talk about decolonisation we're also talking about the movement that's happening in different universities (P8).

Chapter 7: Decolonising Movements

Having considered what decolonisation might mean as a critique, both intellectual (Chapter 5) and material (Chapter 6), we now consider what meanings are given to decolonisation as a "movement" (P1-10). Participants referred to decolonisation as a movement in a variety of ways; by describing its progress and momentum, identifying networks and collaboration, and describing the different roles taken by students and staff. In relation to pitfalls and barriers, thinking of decolonisation as a movement identifies the danger of high student turnover and the loss of institutional memory, as well as the injustices in an unfair division of labour and the imposition of leadership roles.

Progress and Momentum

Participants' responses showed that decolonisation as a movement at Cambridge has progressed at different rates across different departments (P1-10). In describing this progression, we can consider the classic account of a social movement as having four stages: emergence, coalescence, bureaucratisation and decline (Blumer 1969; in Della Porta and Diani 2009, 150). In relation to decolonisation at Cambridge, in some cases 'bureaucratisation' can already be observed; such as the formation of the *Consortium for the Global South*, departmental working groups, and the CUSU BME campaign's *Decolonise Cambridge Network*. Other departments are better described as being at the 'emergence' stage, having only very recently held their first decolonisation assembly, or having yet to hold one. In general, I argue that 'coalescence' is the most appropriate category with which to characterise decolonisation at Cambridge at the present time, given the number of actors who have been and are being brought together under the umbrella of the movement.

In locating the momentum for decolonisation, certain participants characterised the movement at Cambridge as a "student movement" (Wamai, P4), in part due to the prominent roles played by students in promoting and advancing aspects of the decolonisation agenda. For example, the Decolonisation Rally in October 2017 was organised collaboratively by five different student groups, and the majority of the speakers at the rally were prominent figures from those groups.

Participants described the movement as coming from the bottom-up: "There is momentum, I think the interesting thing about it is that it's coming from below" (P5). This "agitational energy" (P5) was not exclusive to organised events but was also displayed spontaneously, for example in students bringing decolonisation themes to other events in 'impromptu reflections' (P3). One participant stated that: "what the decolonisation movement gives me hope for is that demand and change at the grassroots seems to be able to have an incredible 'trickle-up' effect" (P8). The 'trickle-up' effect relates to the way that student demands have found purchase within certain departments; activating key members of staff, leading to events that raise awareness, even engendering curriculum change.

Within several departments, a core group of engaged students have presented a complex and nuanced case for the decolonisation of the University (P1; P5; P6; P8). Participants characterised student demands as "really well articulated" (P1), with "a remarkable amount of sophistication" as to what decolonisation at Cambridge means. In many cases, these demands have driven the decolonisation agenda through what is brought up in open meetings or included in open letters (P1; P3; P5). For example, one respondent described a faculty forum on decolonisation at their department as: "really just reporting on student discussions we'd had at an open meeting the term before" (P3). Student demand has also played a role in *enabling* faculty initiatives; not just raising the agenda, but also *legitimising* those who support it:

> students' demands also enabled a limited number of scholars or lecturers at the department to say "we need to do this, students are demanding it. It's not coming from me, it's coming from them" (P1).

All participants referred to the need for student pressure needs to continue, insisting that students continue to organise among themselves:

> it is the strength of continuing student organisation, to organise outside of these institutional structures, to teach each other, to co-produce knowledge, that kind of stuff I have no control over but it needs to happen, for them to keep holding the institution's feet to the fire (P6).

Thus far, continued student pressure has kept the decolonisation agenda on the table. One participant reflected on this, stating that: "I think some people thought if they just waited it would go away, that it was just a fad" (P1). References to high attendance came up time and time again (P1;

P3; P8; P9; P10), with "loads and loads of people" (P8) coming to decolonisation events. In my observations of open meetings at the departments of Sociology (31st Oct), English (1st Nov), Education (7th Nov) and History (28th Nov); all drew more than 50 people, as did the Decolonisation Assembly for student groups (16th Nov), and the 'teach in' (26th Mar). The CRASSH (2016) seminar series was similarly well attended: "most of our seminars were packed out completely, out the door, really really packed out, and we could see that there was huge interest". This level of interest has been maintained since 2016, as at a recent "Decolonising Classics" open meeting, the host opened by stating to the packed room: "as you can see, we underestimated how many people would come" (8th March 2018). One participant described the powerful impact of high attendance upon senior management:

> all of a sudden there was this big meeting and so many students, undergrads, MPhils, were flooding into the room, and they [management] were so shocked. So they [students] don't seem to know how powerful that is, and that was timely, really (P1).

As well as having a powerful impact on departments, these occasions can have an impact on participants. At a panel discussion featuring the journalist Reni Eddo-Lodge (15th May 2018), a longstanding academic reflected on "the most people of colour in one room I've ever seen at Cambridge". Indeed, the vast majority of the audience (in a full lecture theatre) were people of colour, and more women than men.

Networks and Collaboration

In these spaces, participants emphasised how decolonisation efforts had led to the creation of new networks:

> What was really great about the seminar series was that we got to invite a lot of people to come through that we wouldn't have otherwise been able to meet (P8).

> it was great for me because I got to meet a whole bunch of people who were also working in these spaces, so I didn't feel completely alone (P3).

As well as offering support for isolated actors, these networks have facilitated the exchange of ideas, with one participant stating that at departmental assemblies "we have been able to build really exciting coalitions" (P3). Some of these coalitions were small scale, such as the *Decolonise our PhDs*

reading group, others are larger, such as the *Consortium for the Global South*. One participant noted that the feeling of "investing in my students" was one of the things that kept them going in what is difficult, exhausting work:

> I think to me something that has been really energising – and I say this really honestly – is my students. So I've got a fabulous group of students who are almost all women of colour (P3).

Sharing the burden between staff and students is one of the strategies for making the decolonisation movement sustainable for the longer term. Participants described the short duration of the student life cycle at Cambridge was described as both an advantage and a disadvantage. One participant noted that the short life cycle gives students more freedom to engage in activism (P10), but on the other hand, there is the loss of key figures and institutional memory: "my worry is that the students that are so important, at some point they will leave" (P8). Several participants noted how progress is often down to the actions of "particular group of students" (P10), vulnerable to turnover. This illustrates one of the ways in which the movement is shared, that the students can bring this energy and support for staff, whilst the staff ensure longevity:

> what we wanted to do was to kind of use our positions as faculty with ongoing positions to help build the institutional memory, because MPhil students for example are only here for 9 months (P3).

This is one of the reasons why students "need to collaborate with like-minded faculty, students, and community representatives in order to enact change in the academy" (Wane et al 2004, 507). Indeed, some participants were willing to make a long-term commitment in this area, stating: "I want to make as much of a contribution as I can because I'm here for the long haul, I'm gonna be here until I die!" (P6). Others had already been in the institution for many years, and although one participant admired and appreciated those who have "been doing this [work] forever" (Wamai, P4), they emphasised the cost of such a commitment:

> I'm just thinking "urgh, if I stayed here for five years could I cope?". But then how else do we change this place? (Wamai, P4).

Here Dr Wamai refers to the need for key faculty members to stay at Cambridge to enact change, but also the exhaustion caused by such efforts and the fact that exiting the institution might be a necessary act of self-care or survival. Many participants explicitly mentioned the way in which the

burden of decolonising labour is unfairly distributed, falling primarily on those already burdened by the systems in question.

Division of Labour

In several departments, there was an expectation that people of colour had to take the lead on the issue of decolonisation, a view which one participant described as:

> the people who are the ones who have directly experienced those forms of violence have to take on board a more proactive role in trying to tackle the reproduction of those forms of violence (P9).

This view was presented as problematic, as on the one hand there is feminist standpoint logic which provides women of colour with an "epistemic privilege" in first-hand experience of the problem (Harding 2004); but on the other hand, they should not be subjected to the triple burden of both the violence, the onus to tackle that violence and the gaslighting (being told the violence does not exist), as well as being further marginalised for 'banging on about race'. Hence the participant described the need to ensure that "their experience is given due import and weight and is transmitted as a serious thing to people who wouldn't otherwise know about it" whilst at the same time avoiding "putting all of the burden of work on the people who have experienced those sorts of oppression" (P9). Another participant noted how the expectation for women of colour to take the lead on 'race' issues "diminishes the idea that there is collective ownership over these issues, because then it becomes the burden task of those women [of colour]" (P3). In fact, it is another imposition and a removal of choice to expect a woman of colour to be the designated 'race person' in the faculty:

> I think there is that expectation that "oh, I'd be the race person in the Faculty" and I'm like "no, I don't want to be that" of course I want to stand up and speak out for race justice issues but I'm not THE person, this needs to be owned by [more people] (P3).

Aside from stymying collective ownership of race issues, the designation of a 'race person' can be an institutional strategy to sideline the issue of systemic racism in higher education. Ahmed and Swan (2006, 98) state that: "It is by making certain bodies responsible for diversity that other bodies, and indeed the organisation itself, are let off or even discharged from doing this work". And it is not just a case of being sidelined or marginalised, but of being further burdened. Several participants

mentioned the incredible toll that 'diversity work' has taken on them, emotionally and physically, and also on their academic careers (P2; P3; P4):

> when I came to Cambridge I didn't want to research Cambridge, I didn't want to come here to change this institution, I'm actually recognised for research in my field! But you know where other people can go off and write their third or fourth book, and get promoted, I feel like I have to do that [decolonisation] work, as well as the labour of pointing out precisely this epistemological ignorance through which this institution functions (P3).

This phenomenon was indicated by another research participant, who described the situation in which BME academics are too busy doing the decolonising work to write academic papers about decolonisation:

> that's where we lose our time from doing the academic work required [...] so that's why even now, you will see, even three, five years from now, most of the books, journal articles, anything, will be by the same privileged white academics (Wamai, P4).

Whilst white scholars gain academic recognition and advance their research careers, academics of colour are left overburdened with 'invisible labour': "our time is taken up by all the emotional labour from the real work" (Wamai, P4). And this emotional labour is of course unpaid: "Oh gosh, all the invisible labour that I do for this institution! Yeah, unpaid labour" (P3). Ahmed and Swan (2006) describe in detail how career prospects suffer from undervalued and under resourced labour that causes stress and limits prospects for promotion. However, often there is no choice but to do this labour, given its importance in supporting and retaining students of colour:

> I spend half of my time in Cambridge doing pastoral work for black students, I don't have the privilege to say no [...] of course I could say no, but, by my saying yes they'll last four years (Wamai, P4).

In evoking the "privilege to say no" (Wamai, P4), this participant alludes to a *removal of choice* in feeling a certain responsibility to be a support figure. Whether it's students in need or opportunities for advancing the agenda, it can feel like: "I have to take them, I don't have a choice" (P2). Whereas a white academic has the privilege to choose when and where they engage in diversity work or antiracist activism, the same choice is not available to scholars of colour:

> they don't live it like us brown black bodies, in these spaces, coming (most of the time) from the former colonies. So we live this. So for me I cannot, it's not a luxury of whether or not I choose to, because just by my black body being in this place I'm confronted with these issues (Wamai, P4).

Here the participant illustrates the fact that being unable to choose the colour of your skin means being unable to choose whether or not you are subjected to racism. This makes it all the more important to try and share the burden of labour:

> it's also about putting the responsibility on the white students and the white faculty, and all these privileged people, not just white, to change, to step back and listen. But we don't even have spaces where that happens (Wamai, P4).

According to this participant, creating these spaces for shared dialogue is a primary concern of the decolonisation movement going forward. It is to this endeavour that I turn in Chapter 8.

> how can Cambridge decolonise? First I think there's need for a very open conversation (Wamai, P4).

> I think it's probably just about creating different spaces for these conversations to happen (P3).

Chapter 8: Decolonising Dialogues

The final and perhaps most important meaning of decolonisation for the interview participants was the creation of space for democratic, cross-hierarchical dialogue, which could facilitate a shared process of learning and unlearning. Departmental support or opposition for these spaces was reported as significant, although impromptu student reflections created spaces even where they had not been designated, linking back to the idea of decolonisation as a grassroots, bottom-up movement. Further barriers included the potential difficultly of holding these dialogues, particularly conversations about race in the face of post-racial social norms, and so particular effort is required to keep race on the agenda when the more ambiguous language of diversity is preferred. Again, the issue arose of the unfair burdening of certain bodies in the management of these conversations, further emphasising the importance of alliance.

Four interview participants explicitly described decolonisation as involving "dialogue" (P3; P4; P5; P6), others did so in different words, such as the need for "really deep honest inquiry" that is also "collaborative" (P8). The emphasis on dialogue frames decolonisation as "a shared project" (P5), in which "there has to be input from different perspectives" (P8). Making more people feel invested as stakeholders is significant because decolonisation tends to be framed as the sole remit of women of colour, which is emphatically not the case (P2; P3; P5). Instead, dialogue can create connections and a sense of "collective ownership" over the issues (P3). Shared discussion can also assist in addressing internalised oppression, since "even one's most private thoughts are learned and given meaning through group life" (Williams 2008). In relation to these colonial mindsets, one participant noted that "everybody is there to do some learning and unlearning, whether you're of colour, whether you're black, brown or white majority" (P5). Their reference to "learning and unlearning" (P5) here may be in relation to Tiostanova and Mignolo's (2012, 31) *Learning to unlearn*, which takes aim at the "logic of coloniality" in higher education. The idea that this is a "shared project" means that everybody is involved in the learning process (P5), even across student-teacher divides, as another

participant noted: “I think that both the providers and the receivers of teaching need to enter into a dialogue, I think that’s really important” (P6). Here decolonisation is evoked in relation to the idea that: “It is from sharing, having dialogues, and challenging each other as scholars that we learn” (Wane et al 2004, 505). Of course, as noted in Chapter 4, differences in positionalities means differences in experiences, and hence engagement with that process:

> They may have to consider it in many different ways, you don’t want to flatten it out and say: “everybody has exactly the same work to do”. Everybody is a stakeholder in a different way, and would have to take up the challenge of ‘unlearning’ differently. It can’t presume the innocence of one party, and the guilt of another, that’s not helpful (P5).

In referencing the presumption of ‘innocence’ or ‘guilt’, the participant notes the insidious ways in which colonial oppressions are internalised and re-enacted, even by those within marginalised groups (Fanon [1952] 1967). Hence decolonisation presents a reflexive challenge to everyone, across lines of ‘race’, gender, sexuality, religion, ability, and so on. Understanding decolonisation as dialogue broadens the scope of what can be considered as decolonising work in the university, as on one level: “I think it’s probably just about creating different spaces for these conversations to happen” (P3).

Creating Spaces

These spaces have been created both by design (in meetings and assemblies organised by students, staff, and departments) as well as spontaneously, in ‘impromptu’ group reflections:

> what I felt like was a great success from that conference was that you had very senior, very prominent academics in the room, sort of professor types that carry a lot of weight in the field, but also a lot of students were there, and I was just so heartened that at the end of the day, there was a very impromptu, poignant reflection led by students on what it meant to be a student of colour at Cambridge studying the Global South, from the ‘Western Perspective’ that operates at Cambridge. I was just heartened that clearly there was that space now for that to even be said; I know it’s not much and I know it’s not a victory (P3).

Despite the fact that this participant says ‘it’s not a victory’, the accounts of other participants speak to the contrary (P2; P3; P5; P9). Also in the academic literature, such as space is presented as a rarity:

> one participant, who was a woman of colour and a doctoral student, was shocked that we spoke of such things because it was unthinkable to voice such opinions in her university. Various audience members concurred, reflecting on the resistance that inevitably accompanies the work of decolonisation, which challenges academic norms (Wane et al 2004, 508).

With regards to whether or not decolonisation is 'unthinkable' at Cambridge, there are remarkable contrasts between departments. In some departments, decolonisation is seen as a necessity rather than the 'unthinkable'; with Heads of Department recommending the formation of designated decolonisation working groups as departmental subcommittees, and even sitting in on working group sessions. Often the support of key figures in positions of authority can make all the difference, as one participant noted:

> Right now our faculty chair is incredibly sympathetic to the question of decolonisation; has given me full mandate to speak about it, to do what I can, and that really does make a difference (P6).

In other departments, decolonisation has been regarded with suspicion, another participant stating: "they appeared to be threatened by the idea of even having an open meeting", asking questions like "what are you doing, what are you trying to get at here?" (P3). They expanded:

> I was like hang on, I'm actually calling this open meeting because so many people have asked me, "what is this decolonise thing that you're interested in?" There is an academic argument, an intellectual case to be thinking about this, it's not just to blow shit up. And so I thought it was a kind of pedagogic intervention to create that space where we could kind of have that sort of dialogue within the faculty and it was attended by more than 50 people, students and staff, together in that open meeting, but in organising it I really got a lot of heat from certain senior management, to the extent that there were [...] fairly disparaging questions about why I was bothering (P3).

Despite the department's attempt to throw cold water on the meeting, the high turnout "absolutely" legitimised the issue in the department (P3). Their creation of this critical, reflexive space can be seen as a 'pedagogic intervention' because it "challenges academic norms" in departing from what is normally reproduced (Wane et al 2004, 508); bringing into the foreground what is usually in the background (Ahmed 2017). In straddling traditional hierarchies by bringing together students and staff, the pedagogic intervention is also a democratic intervention. The link between decolonisation and democratisation was made emphatically by another participant, who stated:

> It's got to be democratic. I think the fundamental imperative is to democratise, and to bring in equality and justice radically into the conversation, meaning that nobody is exempt (P5).

The call for such efforts is common in the academic literature regarding social justice education, with Walker (2005, 143) arguing that: "more attention is needed to foster democratic and deliberative institutional spaces, practices and dialogue" in order to challenge hostile or ignorant attitudes, and shift flows of power (Walker 2005, 143). These efforts build on the liberatory potential of education, harking back to bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). The appeal to democracy in particular is significant, as there are several critiques levelled against the neoliberal university as being undemocratic (Giroux 2014). Indeed, Cambridge University has been publicly criticised on several occasions for ignoring popular opinion to divest, as was indicated by 140 members of Regent House passing a pro-divestment 'grace' on the issue, in addition to an open letter signed by over 3,000 students. Democracy and decolonisation were further linked in student protests, which featured call-and-response chants of "I say decolonise, you say democratise". In the decolonisation literature, decolonisation is presented as necessary to restore democracy and challenge racist social structures. Sousa Santos (2018, 170) argues that: "Under conditions of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy no high intensity democracy is possible"; and for Fanon ([1952] 1967), racism is structurally built into capitalism.

Difficult Conversations

Participants are under no illusion over how difficult these discussions will be, as one warns: "I think it will mean having incredibly difficult conversations and having the sheer stamina to see those conversations out" (P5), but they are crucial: "we need to have robust discussion" (P3). Part of the difficulty will arise from the topics of conversation, such as talking about 'race' in a society where "colour-blind" norms dominate (Sue 2013, 663). One participant noted:

> I think that right now what's interesting about the moment in Cambridge is that at least some of those who are pushing for decolonisation are talking about race explicitly, and the institution will do it's best not to. And I think that pushing against that is important (P5).

Another participant came across this precise issue during a meeting in their department:

> Now what I found really interesting and problematic from that meeting was that people who weren't really involved in the movement found it really difficult to even use the word "race" or "racism" (P3).

Here the participant identifies one of the most pressing concerns for decolonisation as a movement. If the movement wants to grow and gain wider support, it needs to find a way of communicating with those who are unfamiliar with foundational postcolonial or critical race theories, who are still beholden to colour-blind racial norms, and who may harbour significant racial anxieties. In negotiating this challenge, one participant highlighted their concerns with having to make racism easy to talk about, or "palatable" (P3):

> You mentioned this word "palatability", that was precisely a comment that we had from one of the few white people in the room because the question was about how do we bring these critical race theories forward in a way that policy makers and practitioners would be able to engage with. So this is, and I said I agree with this, we said we need to make our ideas understandable, we can't just be in this ivory tower theorising and not linking it to change and people who are on the ground doing work. But the critique was, how do we make it "palatable"? And I took real issue with this idea because racism is decidedly unpalatable so why do I have to make it [so]? (P3).

In the face of 'decidedly unpalatable' racism, another participant asked: "Why should there be an injunction to be nice all the time?" in formulating a response (P5). With regards to communicating the issues raised by decolonisation, they expanded:

> perhaps laying things out patiently is helpful, except that that is also a very demanding job and I would not want to take away the right of people to be angry and not be patient (P5).

These responses indicate the ways in which both patience and palatability can become additional burdens, and if these burdens are not taken on, there is a risk of being labelled as "the angry black woman" (P3). This stereotype is doubly unjust given the right of these women to be angry, in addition to the fact that displays of anger in "race talk" often comes from the defensive responses of people in privileged positions who feel that their "worldviews are being challenged or invalidated" (Sue 2013, 665). Dr Njoki Wamai described coming across this defensive response in her department:

> P: they'd be like "how dare you say that?"

> I: They'd be offended?
>
> P: They would not even say they were offended, they would say it in a very intellectual way, and try to put you down, like "oh your argument lacks evidence"-
>
> I: objectivity-
>
> P: yes, and they'll tell you how dare you come here and give us [all this] (Wamai, P4).

Often the experiences of people of colour are questioned, trivialised and dismissed, in a practice known as gaslighting. In being told "how dare you" (Wamai, P4), the victim of racism is blamed for rocking the post-racial boat, or as Ahmed (2017, 37) puts it: "by exposing a problem you pose a problem". Another interview participant spoke to this fact, stating:

> it's absolutely right that you cannot talk about race without being accused of racism, I have never talked about race without being accused of racism (P5).

These ad-hominem attacks are a huge cause of concern, with some BME students fearing retribution if they were seen to be involved in decolonisation initiatives.[10] One participant described such an occurrence at a decolonisation open meeting:

> A white British student [...] was saying that the reason that I am speaking on behalf of the department was because my three other friends who were people of colour were afraid that the professors will come after them (P1).

This anecdote emphasises the fact that for people of colour: "there's also risk involved, I mean this has kind of been risky work" (P3). Joining voices is one way to mitigate that risk, in particular by white allies using their privileged positionality to raise the issue:

> white colleagues speaking up and speaking out, it's absolutely essential that it happens, otherwise it does reduce the moment to very specific women of colour who are doing this (P3).

Strategic alliance is highly important in decolonisation efforts, not just to share out the risk and burden of managing difficult conversations, but also in the creation of spaces for these conversations

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[10] A legitimate concern, given that several students of colour at Cambridge have been targeted by the national press and were subsequently subjected to vicious online abuse.

to happen, as some departments have tried to side-line the issue. In the final chapter, I discuss and conclude the findings of this project.

> Decolonisation is not a metaphor. It is the imagining and building of a liveable world in ways that may literally unsettle even the sympathetic. And our role in this project is to shrink Cambridge and its sister colonial institutions – to make way for those who dream of deeper things than this place is able (Kabir 2017).

Chapter 9: Discussion and Conclusion

The quote used to introduce this research paper, by Audre Lorde, asked: "how many times has this all been said before?" (Lorde 1984, 117). This quote speaks to the idea that decolonisation efforts at Cambridge build on the liberation work of many social justice movements (and particularly racial justice movements) that have come before. Although decolonisation appears new and "in vogue" (Wamai, P4) at Cambridge, the interview data bore out far older critiques, often originating in colonial and postcolonial contexts. In this chapter I compare my findings to existing mainstays of decolonial and postcolonial thought, before concluding this research project and reflecting upon my position within it.

Discussing Decolonising Perspectives

Since the interview participants were all employees of the University of Cambridge, it is perhaps unsurprising that none gave a revolutionary account of decolonisation, as forwarded by Frantz Fanon. For Fanon (1968, 36-7), decolonisation is a necessarily violent, armed revolutionary struggle: "decolonisation which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder." As a reformist rather than a revolutionary project, several participants still framed their involvement in decolonisation as a form of "academic activism" (P10). Regarding this activism, one participant argued that: "one form is working with the institution, and that's just as valid" (P2). In fact, they questioned whether: "we need to question what radical is", suggesting that it might be 'radical' just to open up spaces, for example in reading lists, in classrooms, or at events (P2). Or to get the support of the Vice Chancellor, who through the open meetings and the BME forums for the Race Equality Charter, has talked about racism specifically (and decolonisation more generally) in ways that have not been seen before (P2). Another participant moved away from the idea of radicalism, stating that decolonisation was rather 'common sense': "I don't call it necessarily radical

I think it should be common sense. But the reason it sounds so radical is because we are far from that common sense" (P1).

Being far from common sense evokes the need to move the centre, which is a focus of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work (1992; 1993). Wa Thiong'o (1993) advocates for both a personal and cultural shift away from 400 years of colonial domination towards racial, religious and gender equality. Although the "decentring" frame was favoured by certain participants (P2; P8), it was rejected by others: "I'm not fond of decentring as a metaphor myself because I think it can mean nothing and everything" (P5). Disagreements over particular framings of decolonisation occurred in relation to other notions, such as Mignolo's (2011) concept of "decoloniality", which was invoked by one participant (P9) and rejected by another who stated: "I haven't found decoloniality to be a useful analytical tool" (P10). These disagreements inform us that there is no 'decolonial canon', but rather the emphasis is placed on the utility of a given critique, which means different authors are suitable in different contexts. One participant stated explicitly that analytical utility of an author is the most important concern:

> There are a lot of radical scholars in [country name] who are quite suspicious of this idea that somehow being anti-western gives us the "correct critique", and that we can't learn for example from Foucault. Perhaps we could learn more from Foucault than we could from some [country name] nationalist thinker who [...] doesn't help us to understand the nature of power, colonial power, postcolonial power (P8).

This contribution shows that decolonisation does not mean adding authors to the curriculum on the basis of their nationality or skin colour, but rather for their contribution to understanding the ongoing legacies of colonial domination. Challenging these legacies through intellectual and material critique that focus on the "everyday level" (Wamai, P4) is what prevents decolonisation from being just "one of these cool things to say" (P8).

Research Contribution

In this research project I set out to provide a comprehensive overview of what decolonisation means for Cambridge University, by engaging both in the movement itself through militant research, as well as by interviewing ten active academics. The purpose of building this overview was to help those already involved to reflect on the progress of the movement so far, as well as providing an

introduction for those new to the movement. This aim follows in the tradition of "militant research" (Halvorsen 2015, 469), which creates an opportunity for "internal reflection from within particular struggles that seek to map out and discuss underlying antagonisms". To a certain extent, these opportunities were created in the interview process, during which respondents were given space to reflect on the decolonisation movement and their role within it, as well as within and through the dissertation itself. In relation to the research question, through a grounded theory analysis of interview data, I identified the primary meanings awarded to decolonisation as a critique, both intellectual and material, as well as being a movement and a dialogue. Thinking about decolonisation in terms of these different dimensions helped to uncover the various aims and agenda points under its broad umbrella, as well as identifying pitfalls and barriers within different parts of the process. I hope the result is a small contribution towards identifying and communicating understandings that "will ultimately make this world a better place for all people to live in", in line with the aims of Du Bois and Wright's (2002, 5) "Humanistic Sociology".

Conclusion of Findings

In considering decolonisation as an intellectual critique, participants relayed the importance of critical and reflexive minds and curricula, to avoid the reproduction of white ignorance (Mills 2007) and epistemic violence (Heleta 2016). The main barrier to progress in this dimension was a lack of awareness of power structures, which are reproduced when allowed to rest in the background (Ahmed 2017), and the commitment to objectivity over recognition of subjectivity (Broadfoot and Munshi 2007). As a material critique, efforts to decolonise the university took aim at persistent inequalities in the academy, in terms of access, admissions, hiring and promotions, as well as physical colonial legacies that still exist in the names and statues borne by colleges. Broader critiques also challenged the neo-colonial practices of Cambridge University in the arms trade and fossil fuels industries. The inequalities documented in the academy broadly spoke to the existing academic literature on diversity work (Ahmed and Swan 2006), as well as the racism in the academy (Bhopal 2016; Gabriel and Tate 2017). As a social movement, the decolonisation project was described as having momentum and creating support networks, although it was noted that the burden of both labour and leadership is held disproportionately by marginalised bodies. Shifting and sharing these burdens will require careful negotiations of alliance, as the danger of co-option by departments as

well as individual academics remains a pressing concern. The final meaning awarded to decolonisation was as a shared process of learning and unlearning, facilitated by cross-hierarchical discussion, and this is where decolonisation has the most potential to grow at Cambridge. The creation of these spaces was difficult, as are the conversations that need to be had in those spaces, however they are vital in the pursuit of mutual understanding and reaching decolonising aims.

Recommendations

The broad scope of decolonisation at Cambridge means that work is required at many different levels, both inside and outside the institution, and to greater and lesser degrees of radicalism. Solidarity between student and academic activists working towards decolonisation at different levels will help ensure that momentum continues long into the future. Whilst staff members can get mired in departmental politics, students have more freedom to mobilise and make demands. Where students have a high rate of turnover, staff can help to build institutional memory. Fully utilising these strategic support networks going forward will help in meeting decolonisation aims. Finally, decolonisation work requires attentive alliance, with those with privilege using it to take up a larger share of the burden of labour, where it otherwise falls disproportionately on marginalised bodies.

Limitations

In terms of limitations, the decision to paint a broad picture of the decolonisation movement meant compromising upon the level of depth and nuance that could be provided in the analysis. An earlier research aim was to audit and compare the progress made in different departments, however this approach was dropped once I realised this would compromise the anonymity of my respondents, hence the broader perspective is retained throughout the study. The focus of the research is also skewed towards the Humanities and Social Sciences given the composition of the sample, which leaves out STEMM subjects. The inclusion of students as well as staff as interview participants would have added another informative perspective, however given the constraints, it was decided that informal conversations and involvement in the movement was sufficient to glean insights from a student perspective.

Directions for Future Research

As an emerging field, further research into decolonisation at Cambridge could target specific departments, in a similar way to Schwoerer's (2016) investigation of the Sociology department. A particular focus on STEMM subjects could balance out the greater attention paid thus far to the Social Sciences and Humanities. Additionally, as a university with international reach, future studies could consider the model of education exported by Cambridge Assessment International Education (previously Cambridge International Examinations), which is provided to over 10,000 schools in 160 countries across the world. These studies could examine the "Cambridge Global Perspectives" curricula, and critically investigate the role played by Cambridge University as a "world-leading university" in setting the standard for academic excellence around the world (CAIE 2017, 3).

Personal Reflection

This study has been a huge learning journey for me. From my initial shock when I was first introduced to Critical Race Theory, to embarrassment at my own ignorance, I have swung between being energised and inspired to being paralysed by (white) guilt and self-doubt. Listening to others recount hardships outside anything I have experienced left me with feelings of inadequacy, not knowing what to do, but not wanting to be the person who asks: "but what can we do about it?" Having learned so much from articulate, principled and dedicated students and staff, I set about trying to capture these lessons in the hope that they can be equally useful for others like me. I also wanted to create a resource for the movement, which might help provoke further discussion. Embarking on this dissertation has given me a sense of just how much learning and unlearning I have to do, and it has been my privilege to be able to share (or rather, be led on) those first few steps with a community of compassionate and generous people. Of course, there remains a lot to change at Cambridge, but with decolonisation rising on the agenda in many departments, there is an opportunity to push for a better university, and a better world.

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Appendices

APPENDIX I

Access data collected by the University of Cambridge in compliance with the 2010 Equality Act show that white students have enjoyed consistently higher success rates than students from ethnic minorities when applying to the University of Cambridge. In fact, disaggregating the BME category reveals that some minority ethnicities have success rates that are *four times lower* than the white majority (Fig 1, 2010-11).

FIG 1: UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS BY ETHNICITY 2010-2016

	% of applications made by BME candidates	% of offers awarded to BME candidates	BME candidates' success rate (%)	White candidates' success rate (%)
2010-11	16.6	14.5	24.1*	29.8
2015-16	21.9	20.1	30.7	34.2

(Equality and Diversity Report 2010-11; 2015-16) *The report states that when the BME category was disaggregated, success rates varied from 7.1% to 31.9%. This disaggregated data has not been provided in any years hence.

FIG 2: POSTGRADUATE ADMISSIONS BY ETHNICITY 2010-2016

	% of applications made by BME candidates	% of offers awarded to BME candidates	BME candidates' success rate (%)	White candidates' success rate (%)
2010-11	42.7	39.5	38.7	72.2
2015-16	51	33.7	29.1	50.1

(Equality and Diversity Report 2011-12; 2015-16)

APPENDIX II

273 initial codes were sorted by hand into six thematic chapters around emergent analytical categories, in accordance with the constructivist grounded theory method (Charmaz 2014).