



# DECOLONISE DURHAM NETWORK

## MANIFESTO FOR DECOLONISING

### What?

European colonialism did not end with former colonised nations declaring independence. It continues to shape the society in which we live and the values which we hold. Decolonisation centres the impact of colonialism, both historic and ongoing, in how we understand the world in which we live.

Colonialism is prevalent in many forms of education, especially formal education. It influences how we learn, what we learn, and why we learn it. What we learn is overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, knowledge produced by and centred around the Global West, putting the achievements and knowledge of the West above those of other regions, centring them as the producers and owners of knowledge. In short, 'settler [Western] perspectives and worldviews... count as knowledge and research' (Tuck and Wang, 2012) while the perspectives and worldviews of those colonised are marginalised and discounted. In a curriculum which endorses colonial ideals, we leave out those who do not conform to colonial ideals from our reading lists and our seminars. In a curriculum which endorses colonial learning practices, we establish who holds and how to gain knowledge, and shut out other forms and practices of learning, to our detriment. This is the basis for decolonising our learning.

Decolonising Durham means going further. Decolonising our learning is important, but it is not the only path to follow. By dismantling structures that reinforce and produce colonial values within Durham University, we do more than simply open the doors of this institution to those who were previously excluded. We embrace them, we make them feel welcome in a space which is rightfully theirs. We do this by changing the culture. We investigate the

University's recruiting policy so that it is transparent for all, we lobby for the recruitment of more staff of colour, so that every student is able to see their future in the academy, here and now. We undertake a historical and structural analysis of the university's complicity with colonialism; acknowledge our University's and colleges' practices that have their roots in colonial culture and help them to change.

Moreover, we recognise that decolonisation does not happen within a vacuum. Access to Higher Education is more expensive than ever before, with tuition fees being at their highest since their introduction, rising accommodation costs and academic costs soaring to unprecedented levels. The commodification of education represents a further method of reproducing colonialism within the university- it restricts access to knowledge to only the elite (those that can afford it). Moreover, the values that underpin the marketization of higher education are inherently colonial- the idea that some kinds of knowledge and institutions are more 'worthy'. The institutions, including Durham, that are perceived to be 'worthy' are those that reproduce colonial knowledge. The marketization of higher education places education as a linear receptive act between knowledge-holder (lecturer) and consumer (student). Students should be more than consumers of knowledge; we should be critical participants in learning.

When the university thinks about finance it needs to be centring a clear decolonial approach- that means ethical investments- not investing in banks like Barclays that fund the arms trade and climate crisis. Divestment, moving our money out of companies, means more than not directly funding the arms trade, the university must recognise where they place money is political and ensure they are investing in companies that work for the betterment of the global society.

## Why?

The university - both as a space and as a social function - is political. If we are to recognise, as we do, that knowledge is a source of power, therefore who has access to that power and what is classified as 'knowledge' is political. Decolonising the university is both an inherent moral good and an academic good. Decolonising the academy forces us to better critically engage with the content given to us and places the knowledge we are given within its historical and social context - for example when learning about medical advancements we must engage with the way people of colour were often used as test subjects. Having voices of colour on our reading lists in the Arts & Humanities,

in the Social Sciences, should not be an added luxury, shoved to the last lecture on a module to explore “everyone else”, it should be mandatory. Education is not education if it does not take us outside our comfort zone and learn new things. A demand for a decolonised curriculum is a demand for a curriculum that weaves critical race theory and acknowledgement of the impact of the way colonialism and empire has shaped our past, shapes our present and will continue to shape our future.

Durham is behind both the sector and comparable institutions (the Russell Group) in terms of academic investigation into colonialism, critical race theory and decolonial thought. There are few academics who critically engaging with these themes in their own research, and fewer still who are engaging critically with these topics in lecture theatres and seminar rooms. As an institution with an international reputation to uphold, the failure to recognise colonial narratives within the University and the need to decolonise diminishes us as its students; it denies us the ability to learn and discover to the best of our abilities.

Moreover, Durham University falls behind the Russell group on the employment of BAME academics. Not only that, there is no senior member of staff who is a person of colour. There is no member of our highest decision-making body, UEC, who is a person of colour. No one who has a lot of power in this University is a person of colour. By failing to employ BAME staff, and more importantly by failing to employ senior BAME staff, we implicitly teach students who has knowledge, and as we’ve said before, knowledge is power. We let students believe that knowledge is centred in certain groups, in whiteness, when it is most certainly not.

Not only do we lack staff of colour, we lack students of colour. Our current targets in our Access & Participation plan aims to recruit an extra 25 students of colour per year. With a student total that is currently around 22,000 per year and growing, 25 extra students of colour is not going to change our environment; it is just going to put a few more people through an institution that has been and continues to ignore their needs. The University puts this down to the lack of ethnic diversity in the North East region. This is incorrect on two counts. Firstly, the University recruits heavily from the South East and London, where there is a lot more ethnic diversity in the population, and there are plenty of willing and able prospective students of colour who can and should gain places at Durham. We are losing them and their abilities to competitor institutions because our programmes’ content has not been critically investigated; because our staff and services do not reflect the students’ histories and aspirations; because students fundamentally cannot see themselves as Durham students in the first place due to its reputation. There is a critical lack of amenities for anyone whose life does not neatly fit

into a very strictly defined Westernised culture; e.g. the lack of halal or non-Western food shops, or non-Christian prayer spaces.

Secondly, by putting emphasis on recruiting students from the North East, the University erases the fact that there are people of colour living here, working here, raising families here, and thriving here. By failing to recognise this, the University misses out on competent students on its doorstep, who have important and useful things to offer as students from the region, as well as offering their perspective on what it is like to be a person of colour here in the North East.

Durham University is at a turning point as it seeks to expand and recruit new international students. If we are to be an international university we must ensure we are doing so ethically. The increased recruitment of international students (many from former colonised nations) on extortionately high fees represents a form of neo-colonial exploitation. International students are often seen as “other”, as in not “Home/EU” students; not “one of us”. Who or what is this us? International students are just as much a part of Durham as any other student here. Moreover, charging high international fees puts a differential price on our education. It implies that Home students should have better access to higher education, where international students should only be able to occupy this space if they are financially able. For students from former colonised nations, this is a double attack. They face the legacy of colonialism as it manifests itself in their home nation and governmental processes, and then in obtaining a British student visa and paying the international fees demanded by this University, which are around double the Undergraduate home student fee. International students then face the realities of the hostile environment within our education system with continuous surveillance and a restriction of rights for fear of deportation. Our international students of colour do not see themselves progressing on the academic track due to a lack of academics of colour. If we then recognise the white, Euro-centric curriculum that is prevalent within teaching, this university becomes a hostile environment for international students. To position ourselves as an international university, we need to do better. We need to decolonise now.

## **Principles moving forward**

As the project moves forward, it is important to establish some grounding principles for decolonisation within Durham. These principles are both what we will be guided by, and also principles which we think that the university should see as core to any decolonisation work.

**Education** should be well rounded and critical. This means an education that challenges white euro-centric knowledge and canons. An education that interrogates the racialized implications of canon and material at hand- placing it firmly in its historical context.

A global education is one that recognises the impact of colonialism not just through investigations into the systems of colonisation in former colonised nations, but also one that recognises that the local and the global are inextricably linked. The 'advancements' made in the West cannot be separated from their history of empire. This task is not limited to the humanities and social sciences, it needs to be woven into the fabric of curriculum design and our education.

Education throughout must challenge notions of hierarchy and emphasise co-creation with students, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, in the development of pedagogical changes and module design.

## **Understanding past colonial activity and ongoing**

**complicity** is crucial to decolonising any institution. Durham University was founded during the height of British imperialism and was a leading institution during that time. The power of being not only a knowledge producer, but also an institution made up of elites and colonisers must be scrutinised. The ability for an institution to succeed and thrive during colonialism undoubtedly required participation with the empire- the initial financing and beneficiaries of the university during the empire are an important part of how we understand the university. Examples of Durham's complicity range from the financing of the Oriental Museum through the Gulbenkian Foundation to the historical support of Codrington College in Barbados.<sup>1</sup> The actions of former chancellors and the historical awarding of degrees to colonisers must be called into question. Notably, other institutions such as the University of Glasgow, the University of Edinburgh and UCL have started inquiries into their past colonial actions. In order to understand and critically assess the state of the University as a colonial institution in the present, we must fully engage with how it came to be.

**International students** are more than just "unregulated fee income". The ethics of recruiting large numbers of international students and charging

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<sup>1</sup> The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation was founded with the wealth of Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian who enabled the access of western countries to petroleum reserves in the Middle East and exploited Iraqi oil. Codrington College was founded on and with the profits of sugar cane plantations of enslaver Christopher Codrington.

over double the home/EU fee for the same course need to be revised. Education should be a global, public good and this needs to be centered in all internationalisation efforts, including fee setting and programme development.

The hostile environment in all its forms must be resisted. International students should have both access to study but access to equal treatment during study. The monitoring of international students' attendance and activity acts as an extension of borders within our classrooms. The undoing of colonial borders within the university is essential to any decolonisation project.

International students should have equal opportunities during their time at Durham. Cultural competence and provision need to adapt to the international student experience. From the food available on campus, our anglicised structure to the provision for students adapting to different academic cultures, all experiences need to be catered for and taken into account.

The recruitment of international students should centre decolonisation and reparations. Internationalisation represents an opportunity for the ethical recruitment of students from previously colonised nations through scholarships and bursaries. The social conscience of the University should not end at borders- the extension of scholarships and opportunities for displaced students are essential aspects of an accessible progressive education.

**Climate Justice** must centre the disproportional effects of climate crisis on the global south. Climate change is directly linked to the colonial exploitation of the global south- attempts to redress climate change need to recognise this. When we acknowledge the climate crisis as a result of the systems of global imperialism it is clear that nothing short of large-scale structural change will suffice. Sustainability is therefore about more than a few recycling bins- it is about what we value, the companies we invest in, the research we commission and those we collaborate with. A university cannot claim to care about the environment, nor decolonisation, as long as it continues to collaborate with organisations such as Amazon and Barclays which continue to fund the exploitation of resources within the global south. Moves to climate justice must redress the historical and current exploitation of the global south's resources and seek to prioritise the needs of those in the global south.

**Unpaid labour** undertaken by staff and students of colour often forms the bulk of decolonisation work. It is the responsibility of an institution to critically self-assess its' engagement with and the ongoing internal impact of colonialism. It is natural and important that the process of reflection involves and centres individuals of colour within the institution. However, it is vital that

the people of colour engaging in decolonial activity are not expected to do so without being appropriately remunerated for that contribution, as already people of colour have to deal with the ongoing repercussions of colonialism. A use of unpaid labour in this circumstance is inappropriate and amounts to moving the burden of solving racism and colonialism onto people of colour already navigating the system. Therefore, work undertaken with students and staff of colour needs to be done so in partnership with said individuals, as opposed to an exploitation of, and individuals need to be fully remunerated for their work. It is vital that decolonisation work across the university is not additional labour for already overworked academics and students; as such decolonisation work must be paid and fully resourced.

**The hierarchy** embedded into university decision making needs to change. University decision making structures need to be transparent and open to all. Decisions and discussions about the treatment of people of colour within the university should not take place without decent representation of both students and staff of colour; high level conversations about racism within the university can occur without a single person of colour in the room. Groups such as the BAME staff network and the People of Colour Association need to be more than just consulted- they need to be empowered to make changes. If we are all partners in our education that principle needs to run throughout the university. Representation is lacking, and where it exists, it is often tokenistic. The power dynamics inherent within predominantly white university decision making bodies skew the ability to effectively hold to account and challenge the decisions made. A full review into the transparency and principles behind university hierarchy is vital. Democratic principles must underpin any attempts to decolonise the institution, without them only piecemeal change can be achieved.

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