

## Discussing Decolonisation

A six-part mini-series hosted by the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Team at York St John University (YSJU)

### Guidelines for speakers and participants

#### Intentions for this mini-series:

We have chosen the title 'Discussing Decolonisation' not merely for alliterative effect, but to convey our wish to develop shared understandings and build community discursively. With this aim in mind, we hope to challenge the expert speaker/passive listener hierarchy typically found at academic events, and to facilitate spaces of collectivity, collaboration and creation (Abegglen, Burns and Sinfield, 2023). At various points in this series, we will ask the audience for their contributions, and aim to build a bank of ideas, knowledge and resources that we can share and work on collectively as a community of people engaging with anti-racist and decolonial work.

Through this mini-series, we hope to:

- Share information, experiences and literature to build collective knowledge and understanding
- Consider anti-racist and decolonial work from a range of perspectives and in terms of both theory and pedagogical praxis
- Call the community to participate and to act, building and sustaining momentum around anti-racist and decolonial work at YSJU, and in the sector more broadly
- Provide an agentic space where anti-racist and decolonial work is a collective and participatory endeavour and is not just imposed from above in university strategies or policies, and in which all attendees have a voice
- Interrogate and disrupt existing narratives, terms, practices and structures, cultivating a critical environment where we can ask probing questions and debate different approaches and theories
- Learn from those with knowledge, lived experience and expertise, and from each other
- Challenge ourselves, reflecting on our roles, practices and experiences both individually and as a community
- Build solidarity within the community by holding open and frank discussions in spaces where the safety and wellbeing of both speakers and participants have been considered carefully.

We are conscious that some of the topics, themes, debates and questions raised throughout the mini-series may be challenging, discomfiting and even upsetting, and are likely to be experienced unevenly by speakers and participants. We also understand, as the [Anti-Racism Working Group](#) acknowledges, that as much as we might wish to, we cannot guarantee feelings of safety or comfort for everyone at all times ([Statement on Safety](#), 2023). However, we are endeavouring to create welcoming, supportive, safer spaces of mutual respect and kindness, in which we can and should hold ourselves and each other accountable for the wellbeing of the whole community.

Based upon this premise, we have compiled the following list of community expectations.

### **Community expectations:**

- We will be compassionate, respectful and inclusive in our approaches to challenging topics
- We will be sensitive to others' emotional needs, wellbeing and experiences
- We will recognise that we are all at different stages in our (un)learning about racism and coloniality, anti-racism and decoloniality
- We will look to build collective confidence and understanding, rather than to criticise those with differing experiences and knowledge
- We will enter event spaces with an awareness of our own positionality within racialised structures and hierarchies, and be aware that this will be different from the positionality of others who are present, taking this into consideration when interacting and communicating within the space
- We will be prepared for critical and challenging discussions, in which our own perceptions, beliefs and experiences may be challenged in the pursuit of knowledge building and community learning
- We will be open to thinking, speaking and acting in different ways, and to valuing different ways of knowing and understanding the world
- We will use our voices to share our thoughts, ideas and experiences, but we will also be generous towards others, allowing space for their voices and contributions, too
- We will not censor each other, but we will consider the impact of the words, images and references we use upon everyone present, prioritising others' wellbeing over our personal, intellectual or pedagogical reasons for sharing potentially harmful content\*

### **\*Additional note for speakers**

If you believe it is of vital political or intellectual importance to make a point or say something that might be upsetting to anyone in the (physical or virtual) space, please signpost this as far in advance as possible, and ideally to the organisers in advance of the event. This courtesy will enable us to give attendees the opportunity to decide if they wish to be exposed to any content that might compromise their feelings of safety and emotional wellbeing in the space.

### **What to do if you have concerns about the content, language, actions or setup at the event**

*On the day:*

- Don't feel that you have to remain silent: if you believe you have been exposed to something inappropriate or harmful, be empowered to challenge it by raising your hand to speak (both in person and online) or using the Chat (online).

Other options are to wait and raise the issue during a pause, during Q&As (which will be held towards the end of most events) or by sending a direct message to Laura Key or Lucy Potter via Teams.

- If difficult, challenging or upsetting conversations or topics do emerge, we will endeavour to recognise these and to facilitate short breaks where necessary to allow colleagues to reflect or to leave the space.
- At longer events of more than one session, we will provide a breakout space for quiet reflection, with plenty of time in between sessions for contemplation and rest.
- If you don't feel able or willing to challenge the issue within the space (online or face-to-face), please raise with the organisers either during a quiet moment or outside the space altogether (see below).

*After the event:*

- To discuss any emergent issues or problems, please email Laura Key ([l.key@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:l.key@yorks.ac.uk)) or Lucy Potter ([l.potter@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:l.potter@yorks.ac.uk)), co-organisers of the series. Alternatively, you can send us a message or calendar invite via Teams/Outlook to arrange a confidential conversation either face to face or remotely.

### **Bios and positionality statements**

The brief bios and photographs given below are offered to enable easy recognition of the event organisers. In line with the community expectations above, we have provided brief positionality statements rather than full academic biographies. These statements are written in the spirit of openness and reflexivity that we hope to cultivate through this series.

**Lucy Potter – Teaching and Learning Enhancement Team Coordinator, York St John University**  
(pronouns: she/her)



My political and intellectual commitments are rooted in anti-capitalist thought, which I regard as integral to anti-racism and to any decolonial project. During my postgraduate studies, I became interested in the history and politics of (ongoing) anti-colonial struggle, and conducted research that mobilised world-ecological and Marxist literary criticism to read world literature in relation to the capitalist world-food-system. More recently, I owe much of my learning and unlearning to a Black-led, grassroots, abolitionist, anti-racist movement in education with which I have been organising since September 2020.

As a white, neurotypical, cisgendered woman, who grew up within a middle-class family, in a wealthy London-commuter town, I recognise that I operate from a position of structural privilege and complicity within the racialised systems of harm from which I continue to benefit. I recognise, too,

that – despite my queer marriage and my experience of chronic illness – I remain protected by my background, my whiteness and my now stable, secure employment within UK HE. I therefore come to decolonial work with a politics that is, in some ways, at odds with my lived experience, and endeavour to use my intersecting privileges to amplify more marginalised voices and help bring about lasting change. Besides building upon existing calls for transformation, my hope for this mini-series is that it will enable us all to learn, act, reflect and build power collectively, recognising that knowledge and solidarity come hand-in-hand but only when developed in community, over time.

**Dr Laura Key – Lecturer in Academic Practice, Teaching and Learning Enhancement Team, York St John University** (pronouns: she/her)



I identify as a white, cisgender, neurotypical female, and am working to understand the privileges that these intersections provide and to find positive ways in which to use them both as an individual and in professional contexts. I am a mother and a wife; I am an academic and have also worked in professional services. I was born in the UK but my heritage is European: my grandparents hailed from Estonia, Latvia and Germany, and my upbringing was a vibrant, rich tapestry of cultures and influences. I have come to anti-racist and decolonial work from an interest in inclusive teaching and learning theory and practice, and am striving to recognise, critique and challenge the understandings, behaviours and assumptions in which my lived experience is entrenched – an ongoing and difficult task that will require continuous lifelong learning, self-reflection and conscious effort.

## References

Abegglen, S., Burns, T. and Sinfield, S. (2023) *Collaboration in higher education*. London: Bloomsbury.