



The screenshot shows a web browser window for the University of Surrey's website. The URL is https://stories.surrey.ac.uk/race-equity-conference-2024/. The page is titled 'Parallel session 2'. It includes details about the session: '2a: Decolonising Higher Education provocations workshop' in Room B, chaired by Janet Ramdeo. The panelists listed are Arinola Adefila, Matthew Smith, Gillian Stokes, Janet Ramdeo, Caroline Burns, Luca Morini, Gurpinder Lalli, and Saba Hussain. The title of the session is 'Kicking the Hornets' Nest: provocations on decolonising higher education in the UK.'

The terminology of “Decolonising the curriculum” has come to the fore in Higher Education over the last decade. Crests of enthusiasm and dissent waves (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal 2021; Moosavi 2023; Táíwò 2022) have exposed faults in our understanding of what and how we learn. Movements such as #RhodesMustFall in South Africa and #WhyIsMyProfessorWhite in the UK platformed the conversation for the need for decolonial practices to drive higher education diversification. Woldegiorgis (2021) considers how Ethiopia, where political colonisation did not define geographical boundaries, could ‘Decolonise a higher education system which has never been colonised’, possibly resonating with the UK context. Other scholars (McKay 2018; Arday, Belluigi & Thomas 2021; Shay 2016) discuss how colonial practices permeated political spaces and examine how HE could support a richer and humanised experience for students and staff. The complexity of what has been colonised and how detangling epistemological and psychosocial colonial structures can be valuable is still contested. In which case, what does decolonisation really mean for UK higher education? Whilst many universities have made (valiant) attempts to ‘decolonise’ their practices, do we need a clear and unified understanding of what this is or should be for the UK context? What value will a unified definition have (hermeneutic, analytical, ethical, tactical, communicative language)? Can we have one of the above without the others? (e.g., can it still be a useful “rallying flag” for disparate anti-colonial/anti-imperialist groups, even if it lacks analytical clarity?). Furthermore, we can interrogate the extent to which context matters as we have varying opinions from Hong Kong on the one hand to Canada/Australia and the Caribbean or African countries. Whose voices are we drawing upon to build our decolonial actions and to what extent could they or should they replicate the actions of those systems that faced colonial interference in society, including education? Is decolonisation even possible in a colonial society? Are there any examples of decolonisation effectively taking place, given the continual morphing of its use, with extensions to include wider groups with protected characteristics? Will its roots, and therefore its original necessity, become invisible? We need to ask ourselves some deep questions that are uncomfortable to avoid decolonising higher

education being a superficial and performative strategy that gets sidelined and buried in broader EDI conversations and initiatives. Discomfort creates the momentum to disrupt and develop space for change. The killing of George Floyd in 2020 provides evidence for this. Being uncomfortable is necessary in building understanding and change in the shadow of whiteness that pervades UK higher education. Drawing on all three themes of this conference, we aim to critique the past musings on decolonisation in the UK, to consider if we have even got the definition correct. We then present provocations related to the context today to challenge our thinking and understanding of decolonization in higher education in the UK. Finally, we invite you to consider what decolonisation means for your own contexts in the light of the discussions raised by this session.