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Attempting to Break the Chain: Reimaging Inclusive Pedagogy and Decolonising the Curriculum within the Academy

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Abstract

Anti-racist education within the Academy holds the potential to truly reflect the cultural hybridity of our diverse, multi-cultural society through the canons of knowledge that educators celebrate, proffer and embody. The centrality of Whiteness as an instrument of power and privilege ensures that particular types of knowledge continue to remain omitted from our curriculums. The monopoly and proliferation of dominant White European canons does comprise much of our existing curriculum; consequently, this does impact on aspects of engagement, inclusivity and belonging particularly for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) learners. This paper explores the impact of a dominant Eurocentric curriculum and the Decolonising the Curriculum agenda within higher education and its influence upon navigating factors such as BAME attainment, engagement and belonging within the Academy. This paper draws on a Critical Race Theory (CRT) theoretical framework to centralize the marginalized voices of fifteen BAME students and three academics of colour regarding this phenomena. Aspects examined consider the impact of a narrow and restrictive curriculum on BAME students and staff and how the omission of diverse histories and multi-cultural knowledge canons facilitates marginalization and discriminatory cultures.

Keywords: Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME); decolonising; whiteness; race; racism; diversification; inequality

Introduction

Anti-racist education holds the potential to truly reflect the cultural hybridity of our diverse, multi-cultural society through the canons of knowledge that educators celebrate, proffer and embody (Peters, 2015). The centrality of Whiteness as an instrument of power and privilege ensures that particular types of knowledge continue to remain omitted from our curriculums (Tate and Bagguley, 2017). The monopoly and proliferation of dominant White European canons comprises much of our existing curriculum and consequently impacts adversely on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)[1] learners' engagement and sense of belonging. Within higher education (HE) campaigns such as the Decolonising the Curriculum Movement and Why is my Curriculum White have sought to challenge and dismantle the existing orthodoxies by advocating a curriculum that reflects the multiple histories of Black and indigenous populations globally but particularly within the United Kingdom (UK).

Anti-racist education in Britain provides a cornerstone for reconceptualising how knowledge is proliferated and who should be the custodians of particular types of knowledge, particularly within the classroom environment, where historically the gatekeepers to knowledge have often resembled the White middle-class

[1] Commentators suggest the use of precise descriptions regarding the ethnic background when describing research findings (Bradby 2003; McKenzie and Crowcroft, 1996). For the purposes of this paper, the term Black and Minority Ethnic and the abbreviation BAME will be used to refer to people who are from ethnic backgrounds other than white British (including Black African, African Caribbean, Asian, Latin-American, and other minority ethnic communities) with more precise descriptions used where appropriate. There is a recognition, however, that the term BAME is not universally accepted in spite of its use within the British vernacular. It is important to acknowledge that the term BAME, despite its widespread use, has severe limitations and usually follows non-specific quantifiers such as 'most' or 'some' (Glover and Evison, 2009). Typically, there has been an accepted use of the term BAME, which has been illustrated in research and Government papers. Given the purpose of this paper, this term is applied purely as a descriptive term having been the preferred term for most of the participants throughout this study.

(Arday, 2020; Leonardo, 2016; Peters, 2015). Within the UK and the Academy more generally, the liberal assumptions of multi-culturalism have been integral in uncovering and dismantling the hidden power structures that are responsible for the inequality and racism that pervades within institutions (Andrews, 2019; Leonardo, 2002). Educational institutions, in particular, continue to be complicit in reproducing White privilege. The dearth of Black and ethnic minority gatekeepers to knowledge in the Academy has been a contributing factor in sustaining systemic racism and stereotypes against ethnic minority groups (Rollock, 2016). While gaining traction regarding this issue continues to gather momentum nationally within the UK and globally, the curriculum and pedagogies that pervade within our institutions continue to remain a site for the systemic reproduction of racism (Pilkington, 2013).

The absence of a curriculum that is reflective of an ever-increasingly diverse and multi-cultural society continues to contradict and compromise the lofty egalitarian ideals often espoused by universities. Consequently, such omissions are complicit in sustaining misinterpretations of BAME individuals. There has been a continual silencing, racial minoritisation and 'othering' of non-White people, which has inaccurately shaped the vernacular of this particular diaspora regarding their contributions to world history and global society (Harris and Clarke, 2011). Unpacking this becomes essential in exploring how these identities have been omitted pedagogically and why new canons of knowledge are required in facilitating a more inclusive and representative canon of knowledge. In acknowledging the centrality of Whiteness and how it saturates the Academy there is a need for current gatekeepers of knowledge to relinquish the stranglehold and monopoly to knowledge creation and dissemination (Andrews, 2019). While the paucity of BAME academics within the sector remains evident, there is an emerging rear-guard action which has seen people of colour who have historically resided on the periphery, now taking ownership of the canon in attempts to diversify and decolonise existing the curriculum.

The UK education system throughout its varying tiers (primary, secondary, further and higher), in both policy and practice has often been accused of lacking a coherent conceptualization of the dynamics of race and racism within its curricula (Heleta, 2016). The imbalance of a curriculum that has not managed to stay abreast with an ever-increasingly diverse and multi-ethnic British population remains problematic and continues in some way to be complicit in facilitating racial inequality and disparities regarding academic achievement (Alexander et al., 2015). The lack of scope and breadth regarding the curriculum suggests a monopoly in relation to the canon of knowledges that comprise our curricula (Arday, 2020). This creates difficulties for learners attempting to engage in a curriculum that reflects their history and lived experiences (Alexander et al., 2015). The custodians of knowledge within the Academy have historically been White; this has sometimes resulted in the shaping of a curriculum that heavily leans towards a Eurocentric paradigm as the dominant knowledge canon (Andrews, 2019; Heleta, 2016). Often this occurs in isolation from other historical, cultural and social contexts and factors that have shaped the lexicon of the curriculum, particularly when considering the impact and contribution of people of colour. Our digestion of knowledge is devised through various means but perhaps one of the most notable ways is through the books we consume within educational spaces and how we engage with diverse histories. The context which frames

this is central to developing a pedagogically inclusive learning space that fosters a sense of engagement and belonging (Shay, 2016). Despite notable shifts in decolonising our curricula there remains the need for a collated and targeted focus to address the paucity of cultural diversity within our canons of knowledge that in many ways sustain exclusion by omitting knowledge or sustaining dominant stereotypes about ethnic minority groups (Shilliam, 2015).

This paper explores the impact of a dominant Eurocentric curriculum within higher education and the influence of this upon navigating factors such as BAME attainment, engagement and belonging within the Academy. Aspects examined consider the impact of a narrow and restrictive curriculum on students who identify as belonging to a BAME background and how the omission of diverse histories and multi-cultural knowledge canons facilitates marginalization and discriminatory cultures.

This study centres the experiences of BAME learners within the Academy and aims to glean their understandings of how the decolonising agenda has transpired within the sector and perhaps more importantly whether this has positively impacted upon their learning experience, attainment or engagement. There is also a need to explore perspectives regarding the potential absence of a curriculum that embraces diversity and decolonisation in favour of a more centralised and dominant Eurocentric curriculum. Unpacking this context is paramount in de-centring the dominant Eurocentric canon, which in many ways continues to facilitate forms of systemic and sustained racism and educational exclusion (Shilliam, 2015).

Importantly, this paper will argue that the centrality of a Eurocentric epistemology which dominates the landscape of knowledge remains problematic in not reflecting the multi-ethnically diverse histories within our society. The advancement and centring of such an exclusionary curriculum, in many ways continues to remain a vehicle for the development of discriminatory spaces and propagation of racial inequalities. In challenging the normative orthodoxies, this paper attempts to advocate the benefits of a decolonised curriculum for all learners as a means of navigating an ethnically diverse society by drawing on a Critical Race Theory (CRT) theoretical framework to centralize the marginalized voices of 15 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students and 3 academics of colour regarding this phenomenon. Exploring the need for diversifying the canon also facilitates the need to examine and provide some conclusions on the role of 'gatekeepers' tasked with delivering knowledge and whether this endeavour has included the pedagogical input of students and academics of colour.

Decolonising the Curriculum within UK higher education

Within the UK there has been a continuing critical mass of students and academics that have sustained calls to decolonise the curriculum and diversify the canon at universities 'by ending the domination of Western epistemological traditions, histories and figures' (Molefe, 2016). In particular, anti-racist scholar-activists have called for the end of dominant ideologies that position white, male, Western, capitalist, heterosexual, European worldviews in higher education as the dominant knowledge canon and discourse, in favour of more inclusive intersectional lexicon that embodies global 'perspectives, experiences and epistemologies' as the central tenets of the curriculum (Shay, 2016).

Recent studies (Arday, 2019; Ahmed, 2012; Heleta, 2016; Shay, 2016) have continued to query not only the lack of transformation in the higher education sector but also the mechanisms which continue to sustain such an exclusionary curriculum. The inequitable cultural and structural mechanisms include poor diversification among academic staff and omitting students of colour from curriculum design processes (Delgado Bernal and Villalpando, 2016). Thus, many efforts to change the zeitgeist involve an inevitable disruption of whiteness. However, the centrality of this phenomena occupies and monopolises much of the pedagogical practices that transpire within the Academy (Leonardo, 2016). The centrality of the whiteness to be disrupted has been firmly entrenched in an historical legacy that is deeply rooted, having been imposed through colonial mechanisms as a 'symbol of purity' and claims to legitimate and verifiable knowledge (Sardar, 2008). This whiteness in many cases can facilitate daily overt, covert and subtle racism and the marginalisation of people of colour.

Nwadeyi (2016) argues that colonialism, segregation and other decisive vehicles for entrenching white supremacy have impacted how educational spaces construct knowledge and the historical contexts that comprise how the curricula is historically advanced and consumed. The framing of Black histories and the systematic omission of their contribution to global society facilitates an historic amnesia that creates a very narrow and constrained view of society and more notably the actors that comprise these knowledge canons (Shay, 2016). The effects of this continued marginalisation on academics and students of colour facilitates a learning space which is not reflective of increasing diverse student populations (Tate and Bagguley, 2017). This is perhaps symptomatic of the entrenched institutional racism which still influences much of the discriminatory terrain in the Academy and society more generally (Shilliam, 2015).

The beams of institutional racism continue to remain steady on a foundation of inequitable structures that facilitate imbalances, discrimination and oppression. This continues to remain a stumbling block for the proliferation of emancipatory pedagogies that provide a sense of identity and belonging for students and scholar-activists of colour (Heleta, 2016). Within this context, despite the lofty ideals of universities as egalitarian spaces, these institutions of higher learning remain a significant barrier to culturally inclusive pedagogies that encompass the histories of Black and indigenous people. As Sardar (2008) conceptualises:

> 'If Western civilisation and culture are responsible for colonial racism, and Europe itself has a racist structure, then we should not be too surprised to find this racism reflected in the

> discourses of knowledge that emanate from this civilisation and that they work to ensure that structural dominance is maintained'.

Historically, there are discriminatory patterns within universities which continue to point towards a reluctance for 'gatekeepers' to open the canon to different bodies and traditions of knowledge and knowledge-making in new and exploratory ways (Shay, 2016). While there have been policies and frameworks that centre equality, equity, transformation and change (for example Equality Act, 2010; AdvanceHE Race Equality Charter), institutional cultures and epistemological traditions have not considerably changed. The intention and willingness of policies designed to readdress the balance regarding racial inequality throughout society continues to be undermined by implementation procedures which are often not penetrative in dismantling inequitable and institutionally racist structures (Alexander and Arday, 2015; Ahmed, 2012).

The UK higher education system in many ways 'remains a colonial outpost' and its curricula, reproduces hegemonic identities instead of eliminating hegemony (Heleta, 2016). There is an argument to suggest that there is something profoundly wrong with an Academy that facilitates curricula and syllabuses designed to meet the needs of colonialism while stifling liberation (Mbembe, 2016). The suppression of an agenda that embraces inclusivity and a curriculum that acknowledges our colonial and difficult past is important in reclaiming knowledge and repositioning the narrative for a multi-cultural and diverse society (Alexander et al., 2015; Arday, 2020). In these racially violent times, decolonising the curriculum becomes of critically important in bringing about fundamental epistemological change within the Academy.

The impact of Whiteness on the Decolonising agenda

Dismantling the dominant discourse that pervades regarding this context requires in many ways a disruption whiteness given its centrality with regards to decolonising the canon. The domination of this canon which has historically been the province of the white middle-classes warrants contestation in attempting to better reflect an increasingly, diverse global Academy (Alexander and Arday, 2015). Kelley (2000) states that this colonial domination has often been reflective of a particular disposition which advances an ideology that centres, defines and measures civilization in very white, European terms. The advancement of such an exclusive ideology plays an instrumental role in promoting and imposing Eurocentric discourses and worldviews, while consequently subjugating other bodies or forms of knowledge (Andrews, 2016). Thus, one of the most destructive effects of colonialism was the subjugation of local knowledge and promotion of Western knowledge as the 'universal' knowledge (Andrews, 2019). This endeavour sadly coincides with efforts to erase the historical, intellectual and cultural contributions of Black and indigenous populations and other parts of the 'non-Western' world to our common humanity (Shay, 2016).

There has been a seamless advancement and centring of Western knowledge that transpires at the expense of other knowledge canons which resides outside of the Eurocentric paradigm. Shay (2016) explains that narrowing the curriculum in this way advances notions of whiteness which extend beyond power and

privilege by creating epistemologies and worldviews that are situated in sometimes supremacist and nationalist, identity politics. Andrews (2019) argues that such dispositions consequently impact the capacity to embrace and explore other cultural and global perspectives that move away from the notion of Europe being the all-conquering continent and epicentre of knowledge. Such a discourse must also be interspersed with how global colonization at the hands of many European countries resulted in the prolonged and sustained oppression of Africans and other indigenous populations globally.

The silencing and sedation of this 'alternative' knowledge reduces other bodies of knowledge to little more than secondary and unimportant information that is considered to defame Europe's glorious historical past (Césaire, 2000). The dominant narrative proffered continues to situate the colonised masses as inferior while promoting Whites as superior, heroic and preservers of history (Mudimbe, 1985). Said (1994) adeptly notes that Western European literature has for centuries portrayed the non-Western world and individuals within this diaspora as 'inferior' and 'subordinate'. Unsurprisingly, this has contributed to the 'normalization' of racism among colonialists in developing a notion that 'Europe should rule, non-Europeans should be ruled' (Said, 1994, p. 8). The continual omission of a diverse curriculum that is reflective of a multi-cultural society demonstrates a complicity by some universities to ensure that aspects of curricula remain unapologetically Eurocentric (Zeleza, 2009). However, it also contradicts the notion of the 'liberal university' that is a micro-cosm of our ethically rich and diverse society. Universities and the curricula that resides within them remain complicit in facilitating the opposite of their intended charge to portray inclusion, equity and diversification. Universities reluctance to abstain from undertaking a penetrative process of decolonising to address the shortcomings of knowledge canons that are not reflective of multiple, diverse histories while engaging in systematic historical amnesia remains problematic at best and exclusionary at worst (Arday, 2019). Pietsch (2013) conceptualises this by suggesting that:

> There is a presumption which sets a universality and superiority of 'Western' culture, compounded by 'settler' universities establishing themselves as the local representatives of 'universal' knowledge, proudly proclaiming this position in the neo-gothic buildings they erected and the Latin mottos they adopted.

Through varying guises and reinventions higher education particularly within the West has been designed to facilitate and entrench the power and privilege of the dominant white majority, often at the expense of ethnic minorities that continue to remain on the periphery of the Academy (Heleta, 2016). Encouragingly, the momentum gained from engaging in anti-racist and exclusionary pedagogy has opened global debates concerning epistemological transformations which entail a reorientation away from the colonial and dominant Eurocentric knowledge system (Heleta, 2016).

The sustained pressure is now mounting to dismantle a curriculum which has been weaponised to sustain oppression and while stealthily and violently excluding ethnic minorities conflicts with the ideal of an egalitarian and democratic curriculum that is inclusive of diverse knowledge canons (Andrews, 2016; Shilliam, 2015). For the reasons tendered the charge to decolonise the curriculum remains challenging because despite sustained and concerted efforts by anti-racist educators and activists, the curriculum to a

large extent is inextricably intertwined with aspects of Empire and institutional racism within society and the Academy. Given that the latter remains largely white and Eurocentric, current institutional cultures and structures are not conducive to substantial curriculum reform and destabilising the centrality of a dominant Eurocentric canon (Shay, 2016).

The dominance of this knowledge has historically monopolised the canon in most academic fields of study (particularly in the humanities and social sciences). The narrowness of our current curriculum facilitates a marginalization of our diverse and indigenous histories, by often upholding and maintaining patronising views and stereotypes about the Global South as impoverished and economically deprived (Sardar, 2008). Such reductionist perspectives provide an all-conquering narrative of the Global North as superior. Such beliefs are entrenched within European and supremacist values which continue in many respects to provide the basis for the curricula and knowledge that our learners consume (Heleta, 2016). The Eurocentrism, which dominates the curriculum and transpires throughout the Academy fundamentally, 'seeks to universalize the West and provincialize the rest' (Zeleza, 2009, p. 133). Such exclusionary forms of education minimalizes diverse histories by not critically interrogating the outcomes of a history of patriarchy, slavery, imperialism, colonialism, white supremacy and capitalism (Molefe, 2016).

The shift away from a one-sided and subjective 'epistemological truth' promoted by those attempting to maintain the status quo and resist a decolonising of the canon is a 'reproduction of epistemological blindness that silences other perspectives and ways of creating knowledge' (Motta, 2013: 97). Pillay (2015) argues that this type of disposition is disabling and impacts one's ability to be able to integrate within a multi-cultural society. Further, Pillay states that such pedagogies contribute to members of the Academy having an ignorant worldview or disposition (in particular of the Global South). Further, they add that essentially this becomes another weapon of racism and means of enacting 'epistemic violence' on Black and ethnic minority students. In attempting to understand how this violence influences pedagogical ideologies and curricula, Spivak (1994) defines 'epistemic violence' as the Eurocentric and Western domination and subjugation of the (former) colonial subjects. This definition provides a framework in attempting to discern particularly though this lens how misconceptions are formed and sustained through the Western knowledge canon. The nature of this violence resides in an imperialistic epistemic, that is defined by social and disciplinary inscription (Spivak, 1994). The redeeming feature of epistemic violence remains its erasure of history by building a narrative that Black and indigenous populations have little to offer the 'modern' world (Shay, 2016). Molefe (2016) suggests that this construct is built on a discourse that colonisers were enlightened and their worldviews built the knowledge that we have come to know. The resistance to this disposition rejects the continued enforced adoption of filtered histories which frame people of colour as inferior, consequently positioning them on the periphery of history as second-class citizens.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, fifteen BAME students and three academics of colour were recruited from seven UK based-universities ranging from Russell Group[2] to Post-92 institutions[3]. Fifteen 60-minute semi-structured interviews (with BAME students) and one focus group interview (with 3 academics of colour) were completed in attempting to glean perspectives on aspects of decolonising the curriculum and an exploration of the potential for a more inclusive pedagogy within higher education that is reflective of a diverse British society. The recruitment of participants was facilitated through access to extensive BAME academic networks such as Black British Studies Network and academic and professional communities that focus on greater diversification within higher education.

Initially, participants were enlisted through a purposeful sampling process which involved recommendations from several BAME colleagues. Social media platforms and engagement with University Student Unions were also utilised to enlist and recruit BAME students. Additionally, convenience sampling was used to diversify the pool of participants and responses to ensure that the sample was as representative as possible regarding the broad ethnic minority demographic within the sector to be considered (Cohen et al., 2011; Lamb et al., 2012). Throughout the study all efforts were made to maintain participant confidentiality and anonymity by adopting pseudonyms and numbering participants throughout the study.

The initial part of the study involved each participant being given an anonymous self-administrated questionnaire to complete which was deposited into a ballot box. The study was primarily based on excerpts from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions which included 17 participants from the following ethnic groups: Asian/Asian British (n=4); Black/Black British (n=6); Mixed-Heritage (n=4) and Latin-American (n=3).

The objectives of the study were explained to the participants, and informed consent was obtained. Discussions were facilitated by the researchers who had experience in cross-cultural working dynamics and qualitative methods. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In addition to the recording discussions, written notes were also taken and flipcharts were utilised for participants to engage in mapping and documenting patterns of thought (Davies et al., 2009; Jones and Berry, 1986). Each participant was encouraged to speak and express their experiences of engaging with a dominant Eurocentric curriculum that continually omits Black, Asian and minority ethnic history that emanates from the Global South, and their enduring impact on the Global North within a higher education context.

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[2] 'The Russell Group is a self-selected association of 24 public research universities in the United Kingdom. The group is headquartered in London and was established in 1994 to represent its members' interests principally to Government and Parliament. Representing the UK's leading universities, the Russell Group has historically been committed to maintaining its status as research intensive in addition to having unrivalled links with business and the public sector (The Russell Group 2018).

[3] New University, synonymous with Post-1992 University or modern university, is a former polytechnic or central institution in the United Kingdom that was given university status through the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 or an institution that has been granted university status since 1992 without receiving a royal charter (Armstrong 2008).

Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes that were concurrent and commonly emerged amongst the participants regarding their views on the decolonising the curriculum agenda and the wider implications for issues such as belonging and attainment. The researchers became familiar with the scripts and notes and developed an iterative coding scheme using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. This process involved the identification of common words and phrases expressed among the participants. These were coded and subsequently grouped into themes and sub-themes to illuminate commonalities in experience. Transcripts were coded according to theme. It is important to disclose that during the data review process, new themes and sub-themes emerged and were adapted in an iterative process (Brawn and Clarke, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011). Additionally, the analysis phase of this study was also informed by a CRT framework that situates society as fundamentally stratified along racial lines (Hylton, 2012). This framework remains an effective vehicle for education researchers seeking to pinpoint the impact of racialized experiences on belonging and attainment (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Malagon et al., 2009).

Establishing positionality and proximity to the research was essential in an attempt to acknowledge and reduce researcher bias from an ethical perspective. There was some acknowledgement that the researchers were closely associated with racialized discourses. Therefore, some organic bias was inevitably inherent, although all protocols were administered to ensure objectivity was maintained and any potential biases were minimised throughout the study (Cohen et al., 2011). The researchers independently read the scripts and coded and analysed the data to enhance the validity of the emerging themes and claims. Anonymised quotes from the participants were used to illustrate pertinent themes identified within the study.

The adoption of CRT within this study is an attempt to centre marginalized BAME voices that often remain on the periphery. The interview design was informed by a critical race-grounded methodology process (Malagon et al., 2009). This paper positions primary research data alongside existing literature, by drawing on the emerging body of substantive pieces already conducted on decolonising the curriculum and decentring dominant Eurocentric curricula in favour of a more representative and inclusive pedagogy (Joseph-Salisbury, 2016; Tikly et al., 2004; Williams, 2011). This study attempts to recognize the potency of a diverse, multi-cultural curriculum and the inextricable link between purposeful learning experiences and attainment (Tikly et al., 2004). The study undertaken attempted to demonstrate the need to move beyond restrictive forms of curricula that endorse an exclusionary canon which continues to disadvantage people of colour in the Academy.

Dismantling the dominant Eurocentric canon and Decolonising the Curriculum: Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) student and staff perceptions

This study identified three broad inter-related themes based on the perspectives of BAME students and staff in relation to the lack of diversification within the curricula. The themes developed considered the following contexts within universities: (1) Feelings of belonging and marginalisation within the curriculum, (2) The importance of a diverse and culturally broad curriculum, and (3) The importance of a decolonised

Curriculum for all. The themes identified were comprised in an attempt to glean and illuminate the problematic nature of our current curriculum, particularly for BAME students and staff attempting to establish a sense of belonging, community, history and inclusion.

By highlighting participants' experiences of a dominant Eurocentric canon, the excerpts provided argue for a more inclusive Academy in regards to knowledge dissemination and construction within our learning and pedagogical spaces. The need within the Academy to diversify the canon, has coincided with a critical mass of scholar-activists attempting to illuminate the experiences of individuals that remain on the periphery of an exclusionary Eurocentric curriculum. Acknowledgment of the problematic nature of such an exclusionary curriculum could be positively consequential in regards to initiating sector-wide change through senior university stakeholders and policy stakeholders. The explorations proffered in this paper provide a catalyst for senior stakeholders and universities to draw on a robust body of narratives that focus on the lack of diversification within our curriculum and the subsequent effect on BAME students and staff.

Feelings of belonging and marginalisation within the curriculum

Through the interviews conducted in this study, as well as a review of existing literature, it became clear that the curriculum in its current guise omits other bodies of knowledge associated with BAME lived experiences. Leonardo (2016) suggests that the omission of other bodies of knowledge besides the dominant Eurocentric canon denies Black and ethnic minority students their identity and history. Further he suggests the importance of providing a curricula that encompasses all histories in an unfiltered way that does not subjugate particular groups of people. This claim is consistent with the findings of this research. Symptomatically, feelings of exclusion and belonging within the curriculum were highlighted as a primary factor with regards to feelings of marginalisation and exclusion from the learning space for both students and staff.

In this section, participant perspectives focus on their experiences of learning within universities, with students recognising the patterns of exclusion and perhaps more importantly, how this makes them feel:

> When you think about our curriculum it is actually very White and in many respects quite exclusionary. As a student of colour when you are sat in that space you feel it, you feel like none of this relates to me. When they (lecturers) do talk about Black people to be honest it is in quite bad and limiting terms… **(Female, Mixed-Heritage, Student, 21).**

In this excerpt, the commonalities of students being racially minoritized through aspects of the curricular has long been cited as a barrier towards promising attainment (Law, 2017; Leonardo, 2016). In the excerpts that proceed, many of the experiences proffered speak to wanting see one's self reflected in the knowledge provided in attempting to establish a sense of belonging:

> As a student you are sat there and you are listening to a lecturer talk to you about race… who in many respects does not understand what it is like to be a person of colour. The contexts that are presented from a curriculum point of view in many cases speak to ignorant stereotypes about people of colour and this does create a sense of belonging in the classroom, if anything it makes you want not to be there. If you are not there it makes it hard to complete the

> assessments to the absolute best of your ability, and then you get poor marks. It's a vicious circle… **(Male, Black, Student, 4).**

A central theme in attempting understand these experiences for BAME students becomes centred around the ways in which knowledge is constructed pedagogically and the opportunities afforded, particularly for students of colour to discuss contexts concerning race, racism and ethnicity. Leonardo (2016) suggests that learning spaces within the Academy continuously omit students of colour by providing curricular that in many respects centres whiteness through a dominant Eurocentric curricula. This resonates with the experiences of participants within this study that cited feelings of exclusion within the learning space and curriculum:

> As a member of staff… particular one of colour, I am always keen to hear when students are not comfortable with the curriculum or what is taught… sadly I think what is problematic is the fact that students of colour feel excluded from the learning space and the curriculum more generally. Often, from my experience of working in universities for 23 years, BAME students' opinions or insights are rarely sought after when designing curriculum content. This only exacerbates the feelings of exclusion for students of colour… **(Female, Mixed-Heritage, Academic, 7).**

There was also a collective feeling that discussions concerning this discourse needed to consider the reluctance to talk about issues of race and ethnicity in pedagogical spaces:

> The problem when you talk about decolonisation… particularly in a learning context… is that there is this really palpable feeling of uncomfortability, which can come from people not wanting to talk about race and racism. And when you do talk about it… you spend a lot of your time self-censoring trying to protect the feelings of some white people… who question the legitimacy of claims you are making about how race and racism has historically and presently affected people of colour… **(Female, Black, Student, 2).**

The issues that pervade discussing aspects of race and racism became a prominent feature in the discussions between academics and students concerning aspects of decolonising and diversifying the curriculum. Many of the discourses presented resonated with a resistance to acknowledge the racially discriminatory terrain and the impact this continues to have on ethnic minorities. Such concerns can be situated within context of white fragility and the censorship often undertaken by people of colour when discussing issues of race and racism (DiAngelo, 2018):

> Talking about race and racism… and decolonising the curriculum is really difficult… especially in a classroom space. You are always thinking that as one of a few people of colour in that situation it is not really the right space to challenge a lot of discriminatory and racialized tropes and stereotypes that frame Black people as inferior to White people. Sometimes… lecturers can facilitate these exclusionary environments by the theorists they use and the images which often negatively portray us as Black people… **(Male, Black, Student, 3).**

The excerpts provided illuminate the issues associated with belonging and marginalisation in relation to participants' experiences of engaging in a dominant Eurocentric curriculum that often omits particular types of histories and lived experiences. The issue of censorship was a concurrent theme throughout this phase of the study. Many of the contexts proffered spoke to a general reluctance by educators and universities to engage in meaningful and open discussions about race and racism which de-centre whiteness and

Eurocentrism as the dominant canon of knowledge (Arday and Mirza, 2018; Leonardo, 2016). There was a consensus that the existing canon oppresses and sterilises other histories and knowledge resulting in a non-inclusive pedagogical environment for students and staff of colour (Ahmed, 2012; Law, 2017).

The importance of a diverse and multi-culturally broad curriculum

The importance of a diverse and multi-culturally broad curriculum was a central tenet throughout the research study. For many of the participants the need for a curriculum that encompasses broader knowledges and concepts that drew links between local, national and global histories which are able to reflect the varying diasporas, was felt to be absent in the ever-increasing diverse university space:

> I go to a university that has a really diverse range of people… and a lot of the time I look at what I am studying in the classroom space, and think that this is in no way reflective of this mainly Black and ethnic minority community… and I think that is problematic because we are not learning about our lives, histories and contributions particularly in the UK context… **(Female, Mixed-Heritage, Student, 13).**

It was felt among participants that the unpacking of various civilizations and histories that move beyond a dominant Eurocentric curricula and surface level engagement of other indigenous knowledge is integral to all individuals attempting to establish a broad, worldview that will help individuals to circumnavigate a multi-cultural society. The views of academics' within this study suggested that a fundamental aspect towards progressing this endeavour needed to be situated around developing the pedagogy of teachers. There was a collective sentiment proffered that the capability and capacity to competently teach different knowledges and histories particularly Black and ethnic minority history required bespoke and targeted training:

> One of the biggest issues that I encounter from my colleagues is sometimes the fear of being able to competently teach, facilitate and deliver aspects associated with race and racism. I think there is a pedagogical failing within university teacher training to prepare academics with the confidence to engage and successfully facilitate such topics. The alternative sadly in most cases… is that people stay away from these issues in a classroom context and this creates the type of dominant Eurocentric curriculum that excludes students of colour… **(Female, Asian, Academic, 11).**

The pedagogical training of academics to be able to develop and deliver a more inclusive curricula was something considered to be easily achievable if universities were able to acknowledge the need for decolonising the curriculum and the general benefits to all members of the university community. Arday (2020) suggests that there is a direct correlation between the professional development of academics and educators and their competence to engage in pedagogical interventions that involve decolonising curriculum. According to the participants, the evolvement and mobilization of the decolonising agenda involves continuous engagement in a collaborative capacity with both students of colour and all academics working collegiately on how this can be facilitated and improved:

> I think that as a student of colour… I would really like to see more cross-collaboration between students and staff about decolonising the curriculum. I think with regards to this particular issue we may be better placed to advise academics on what they need to be doing to create more

> multi-cultural learning environments that allow us to see ourselves and our histories reflected in the curriculum… **(Female, Mixed-Heritage, Student, 5).**

The need for developing an agenda which encourages academics and students to work more collegiately on decolonising the curriculum was considered integral to broadening the canon and moving beyond a dominant Eurocentric canon (Tate and Bagguley, 2017). This sentiment echoes existing calls for BAME students to become a more integral part of the curriculum design processes and the need for universities to acknowledge that existing curricula must be cognizant and reflective of the ever-increasing diverse student populations. This builds on the work of scholar-activists (D'Avray et al., 2013; Joseph-Salisbury, 2016; Shay, 2016) who suggest that educational spaces have an obligation to provide all learners with a culturally diverse and broad curricula required to navigate a multi-cultural society.

The importance of a decolonised Curriculum for all

Among participants within the research, there was a consensus for discussions on decolonising the curriculum to be situated within a discourse that extends beyond just the benefits for people of colour. A central tenet that pervaded this thought was the need for all members within society to know the diverse histories that encompass various communities. Through this particular guise there was a feeling of establishing ways to redistribute the burden of this labour as historically this has fallen on people of colour, particularly women of colour:

> I think that this issue involves all of us, I think there is there perception sometimes… that these types of issues are 'Black' issues and very often we… especially women of colour are left to mobilise and drive this agenda even though it is collectively all our responsibility. The importance of a curriculum that benefits us all is central to creating something that is truly inclusive and reflective of us all… **(Female, Black, Academic, 13).**

The perspective on collective responsibility regarding decolonising of the curriculum became a strong theme throughout the study. Further, it was also felt that collective engagement was needed throughout all levels of the university structure from an operational level through to senior university leadership level. Participants noted that diversified curriculums at universities provide the opportunity for the sector to truly be a reflection of equality, egalitarianism and wider society (Arday and Mirza, 2018; Arday, 2019). Among the participants there was an appetite for this movement to become a seminal moment and catalyst for change within the Academy:

> This movement speaks beyond just decolonising the curriculum. This is a very important moment which actually should allow us to reflect, evaluate and take stock of how the current and existing cultures within the Academy disadvantage Black and ethnic minority people. We can use the momentum gained from this movement to challenge and address other discriminatory issues in the sector… **(Female, Mixed-Heritage, Academic, 12).**

The challenging of existing and current structures and cultures in the sector was a prominent theme and there was a feeling that university institutions were fundamentally responsible for the types of discriminatory cultures that existed. Tate and Bagguley (2017) state that the dismantling of existing discriminatory cultures within our university institutions is integral in building an Academy that serves all

members of the university community. Tate and Bagguley's statement is closely alignes with the above excerpt in regards to a consideration of how this seminal moment could disrupt patterns of inequality throughout the sector. It also points towards what became a reoccurring theme; the collective endeavour needed to ensure that inclusivity remains the central stimulus for pedagogically diversifying our universities:

> We all need to make this our work, because we all benefit from an inclusive Academy. We need to create a space where people of colour feel like they belong. In university spaces… it is very sad when as a student of colour, when you do not feel like you belong in neither the curriculum nor the space more generally. If everyone saw the benefit of creating spaces of belonging for everyone, then I think this would go a long way to making people of colour feel like university spaces also belonged to them as well. And that is what this is really about. Belonging is about making all people feel like they belong… especially people of colour who are always on the outside of this space… **(Male, Asian, Student, 16).**

This statement was particularly pertinent because it spoke to the need for a re-evaluation of the current structures within our universities that continually oppress particularly minority groups intersectionally, with specific reference to BAME students in this particular context. The concurrent themes throughout this study resonated with a need to pedagogically engage staff and students in decolonising the curriculum and thinking about the benefits to all members of the Academy to have a diversified canon of knowledge that encompasses diverse histories and contributions. The salient thread within this discourse and the corpus of literature utilised throughout emphasises the need for universities to engage more collaboratively with BAME students in attempting to provide curricula that embraces diversification and reflects the hybridity of our multi-cultural society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The decolonisation movement within higher education continues to gather momentum as it gradually decentres dominant Eurocentric curricula while attempting to address the epistemic violence of colonial knowledge and colonial thought (Pillay, 2015). Higher education as a sector requires a reconceptualization of claims to knowledge that engage with other historical and pedagogical canons. The potential for a curriculum that embraces diversification ultimately equips communities of learners with the intellectual capital to counter the overt and insidious forms of epistemic violence (Pillay, 2015). In such racially violent times attempting to exhume our multi-diverse histories from the annals of a dominant White Eurocentric curriculum becomes essential in creating spaces for indigenous histories, particularly from the Global South as existing and emerging scholar-activists continue to rewrite our histories which have been so cruelly silenced and oppressed by the legacy of colonialism (Zeleza, 2009). The default position adopted within the Academy still positions Western knowledge systems as the singular basis for higher forms of thinking (Andrews, 2016). Thus, the involvement of white allies in the decolonisation project is essential and requires a reflexivity and a decentring of whiteness that repositions ethnic minority individuals from the margins to the centre (Langdon, 2013).

Involvement in diversifying the existing canon requires a recognition of privilege, capital and essentially an unlearning or disrupting of knowledge saturated in historical amnesia and carefully curated colonial histories

designed to subjugate and exploit 'the other'. The epistemological transformation of the Academy and the decolonisation of the curriculum requires targeted interventions such as PhD Studentships for aspiring ethnic minority scholars to diversify academic communities and pedagogical input within university institutions (Leading Routes, 2019). Importantly, such an endeavour goes beyond just diversifying academic workforces. As such action alone does not necessarily guarantee penetrative and fundamental change. Targeted interventions by senior leadership stakeholders require substantial paradigm shifts, which dismantle existing cultural and structural racist practices that continually oppress and marginalise, if the Academy is to engage in meaningful decolonisation of the curriculum, its academics and existing content (Langdon, 2013).

Developing an awareness of our Curriculum and its impact on Black and Minority Ethnic learners

Direct colonial rule may have disappeared; but colonialism, in its many disguises as cultural, economic, political and knowledge-based oppression still transpires throughout all of society's major institutions (Sardar, 2008). As the decolonisation movement continues to gather momentum within the Academy, there must be an awareness that if universities and academics want to genuinely contribute to the pedagogical transformation of a more diverse curriculum, then there must be a profound recognition of what is taught and how this can be modified in diversifying the canon. In its current guise the Eurocentric curriculum, intertwined with epistemic violence – does not contribute to a much-needed reimagining of the past and shaping of the present and future within our multi-ethnic society (Leonardo, 2016). The actualization of this charge can only transpire through a curriculum that accurately reconstructs the negative narrative that pervades the Global South while providing an unfiltered enumeration regarding the atrocities of Empire from a historical, civilizational, political economy and political standpoint perspective (Law, 2017; Tate and Bagguley, 2017).

The opposition to change is deeply entrenched within the fabric of university structures because it disrupts the centrality of whiteness and the power and privilege that encompass this (Andrews, 2016). The ceasing of power, privilege, influence and decision-making upon this phenomena will require a dismantling of the Master's House to ensure a pathway through for all who wish to engage in a more inclusive and less oppressive pedagogy. The inevitable rejection of anti-racist pedagogy will involve navigating an inevitable fragility and resistance from academics who wish for the canon to remain the same, unchanged and uncontested. Fundamentally, such reactions will continue to be typical to any intellectual challenges to existing oppressive pedagogies that create a province for particular types of 'gatekeepers' to maintain a monopoly on the types of knowledge to be proffered, legitimised and celebrated (Heleta, 2016). Thus, debates about decolonisation create discomfort within universities, particularly among some senior stakeholders and academics that have an overwhelming desire to celebrate and filter the effects of Empire and the Colonial oppression, enslavement and brutality that ensued at the expense of Black and indigenous people globally (Shay, 2016). The need for systemic change benefits all members of the academic community and strengthens our bodies of knowledge when differing narratives comprise these canons. The

labour of the decolonisation agenda cannot be left solely to BAME scholar activists, particularly women of colour who have historically and unfairly carried this burden often without acknowledgement, professional progression or remuneration.

The need for a collective effort in Decolonising the Curriculum

A collective and concerted effort is required to redesign our curriculum to provide something that engages inclusively, as these differing histories are required for successful navigation in a truly multi-cultural global society. The disrupting of the status quo with regarding to racial inequality and discrimination within the Academy is inevitably emotionally, mentally and physically exhausting. The mobilization of social and structural change seldom happens throughout history without the instruments of activism, advocacy, dissent, disruption and protest (Langdon, 2013). The cohesiveness of such a powerful resistance is predicated on a sound rational for developing a curriculum that allows students to engage with a plethora of perspectives. There is a sadness that naturally ensues as historically senior leaders within universities have been complicit in supressing and ignoring calls for a more diverse curriculum, with action now only occurring because of the exerted pressure to do so by social movements and campaigns.

While progressive students and academics continue to enforce the need for change by continuing to hold senior stakeholders accountable in trying to create more inclusive cultures and transformative university institutions, the Academy must not become complacent and solely rely on this unremunerated labour. Universities have reached a critical juncture in relation to the decolonising movement, in that there is an opportunity to actively involve and integrate students of colour in the process of curriculum transformation, teaching and learning. An agency that has previously and historically not been afforded to students of colour. Freire (1996) conceptualises the educational space as a platform for students and educators to work cohesively on unveiling the reality, understanding it critically and recreating new bodies of knowledge in the process. In such discriminatory and violent times the process of constructing knowledge requires reclaiming space in attempting to capture an entirely different narrative that focuses on the positive contributions of people of colour historically as a critical act in developing emancipatory pedagogies.

Radical departures from normative orthodoxies are challenging for all stakeholders involved. They are always simultaneously symbolic and visceral. The potential dawn of a curriculum that moves beyond the solely Eurocentric canon opens up new possibilities for questioning what has largely remained unquestioned within the Academy (Mbembe, 2016). The movement to transform and decolonise higher education has now established a global foothold where a coalition of students and educators have become anti-racist activists in attempting to endorse a decolonisation of the curriculum. As scholar-activists there is a need for us to continue to hold university institutions accountable by maintaining non-violent, intellectual and evidence-based discourses, which attempt to de-centre Eurocentrism and dismantle epistemic violence within the Academy in attempting to envision something truly inclusive.

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