

FROM RACISM
TO ANTI-RACISM

HODES,
NOT YOU
ME...
JK IT'S YOU

FEEL MUST
FEEL

DECOLONISE
EDUCATION

#RACISM

DECOLONISING

THE CURRICULUM

DEPARTMENTAL

REVIEW

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Preface

This review was co-authored by students of African, Caribbean and Asian descent, supported and championed by the University of Exeter's Penryn Politics Department. We sought to examine how the curriculum of the Politics Department could be decolonised. We have provided a detailed baseline for future change and have recommended strategies lecturers and the department could adopt in decolonising the curriculum. For the authors of this review, this was a journey and a labour of love. We hope that our efforts plant the seed of transformational change.

Having grown up in the UK, we often felt excluded and marginalised from a curriculum that was not designed for us. We agree with Himadeep Muppidi that "just as we don't design zoos to help the animals examine the displays," the museum was not "designed on the premise that the colonised would, one day, be walking through its corridors." In the same way, we believe that higher education was not designed for the colonised to be sitting in its classroom. What we found most striking in undertaking this review was the exclusion BAME students experienced in university spaces. This was based on their lived experiences as racialised subjects, the eurocentric curriculum and others' lack of awareness of issues of structural racism in the classroom.

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, and the Black Lives Matter movement, many universities, including the University of Exeter, have put forward public statements in support of becoming anti-racist institutions. One way the University of Exeter can do this is by centering the experiences of BAME students. We have never been provided a space like the one we created on this internship to be comfortable and vulnerable enough to unpack how we feel about our experiences in higher education. In this review, we have prioritised the voices and lived experiences of BAME students.

We hope this review provides a foundation for change and for others to see how every field of study is shaped by the legacies of racism and colonialism. Our aim is to encourage open dialogue about Britain's colonial legacy and to work together to create an anti-racist university. We recognise this will be an ongoing process and hope future students, and staff, will carry on the work we have begun.

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Acknowledgements

The co-authors of this review would like to thank those who contributed to this research project. This includes all of the students who took part in the surveys and focus group interviews. We recognise how painful it is to interact with these colonial legacies of oppression and we understand the emotional labour it takes to relive these trauma of the past and present.

We are also thankful to the dedicated staff at the Penryn Politics Department for taking the time to conduct in-depth interviews with us. We would like to extend our thanks to Dr. James Muldoon for assisting us throughout this project, as well as Dr. Shubranshu Mishra, Dr. Joanie Willet, and Dr. Sabiha Allouche who contributed to the staff reflections sections of this report.

In particular, we want to thank the students below who contributed their time to this departmental review, especially during this unprecedented time. We are immensely grateful and without their involvement this review would not have been possible.

Saba Asif
Sharlene Asmah
Marian Akinbohun
Erica Da Silva
Albert Duker
Finnlay Roberts
Kirsten Perkins
Yashwanth Sooriyakanthan

We want to extend special thanks to these individuals who went above and beyond to help us with this review.

Ervin Carungcong
Ciara Fagan
Jay Hollis
Joey Liu

Executive Summary

This BAME student-led review aims to examine how the curriculum of the Penryn Politics Department could be decolonised. Our research uncovered a clear appetite for change within the department from both staff and students. There was a shared sense of urgency in light of the current protests calling for resolute action towards the injustices suffered by ethnic minorities. Across the department, BAME students feel excluded and marginalised as minorities. Their voices and experiences are neither represented nor recognised within the classroom, which leads to further alienation. This review shines a light on a problem that has been rendered invisible for far too long. This review aims to contribute to the growing movement of continual decolonisation - it should not remain as a mere moment.

Key Findings

1. 80% of authors within the required reading list were white. 66% of authors were male.
2. 50% of BAME students surveyed felt alienated or othered by the reading lists of the modules.
3. 11 of the 44 modules had none or just a single BAME author as required reading.
4. Only 1% of authors were from the African continent, with 40% and 21% of authors from the US and UK respectively.
5. 80% of BAME students felt like European or Western knowledge was framed as “mainstream” while others were considered “criticisms.”
6. From our qualitative data students reported racism and white privilege within the classroom which remained unchallenged by module convenors.
7. 65% of students felt that the under-representation of BAME staff negatively affected their academic experience.

Barriers to Decolonisation

Lecturers reported the following barriers which stood in the way of further progress on the issue:

- A lack of time, training and resources as well as a lack of institutional support to engage in the necessary work on modules.
- Attitudes and behaviour of a minority of students who were sceptical towards decolonising the curriculum.
- A discomfort in discussing issues of race, racism and colonialism in the classroom.

Key Recommendations

The following is a list of the main recommendations of the review. For a full explanation see the “Recommendations” section at the end of this document.

Recommendations to Lecturers:

- **Recommendation 1:** Address the under-representation of BAME authors by reviewing the current reading list of each module to reflect a broader perspective.
- **Recommendation 2:** Restructure modules to centre questions of race, colonialism and empire.
- **Recommendation 3:** Employ student interns to assist in co-designing new modules and decolonising existing ones.
- **Recommendation 4:** Diversify assessment types to reflect the experiences of BAME students.
- **Recommendation 5:** Introduce more creative assessments to widen students’ skillsets
- **Recommendation 6:** Critically reflect on the issue of decolonising the curriculum through a personal reflection piece and set targets for how you could decolonise your own pedagogy.

Recommendations to the Department:

- **Recommendation 7:** Introduce an analysis of issues of race and colonialism into a compulsory first year module.
- **Recommendation 8:** Introduce mandatory training for all staff on how to facilitate discussions around race in an inclusive and safe environment.
- **Recommendation 9:** Improve BAME staff under-representation within the department by reviewing hiring practices and support offered to BAME staff.
- **Recommendation 10:** Create a Decolonising the Curriculum Committee to oversee future work on this issue in the department.
- **Recommendation 11:** Insert a new section in module feedback forms relating to how decolonised a module is.

Recommendations to the University:

- **Recommendation 12:** Review the under-representation of BAME staff at the university level, with a particular focus on the senior management team.
- **Recommendation 13:** Establish a university-wide team to focus on decolonising the university.

Definitions

What do we mean by Decolonisation?

We recognise that the definition of decolonisation varies within different contexts. Therefore, in our usage we adopt decolonisation as defined by Keele's Manifesto for Decolonising the Curriculum:

“Decolonization involves identifying colonial systems, structures and relationships, and working to challenge those systems. It is not ‘integration’ or simply the token inclusion of the intellectual achievements of non-white cultures. Rather, it involves a paradigm shift from a culture of exclusion and denial to the making of space for other political philosophies and knowledge systems. It’s a culture shift to think more widely about why common knowledge is what it is, and in doing so, adjusting cultural perceptions and power relations in real and significant ways.”¹

We understand this as the need for a reorientation of pedagogy (*how* we are taught) by situating the curriculum (*what* we are taught) in its context. It seeks to challenge the unequal knowledge production built from existing colonial hierarchies. Decolonisation challenges *where* knowledge comes from, *who* produces it and *who* imparts it.

¹ Margaret Afekafe, et al., Keele's Manifesto for Decolonising the Curriculum, accessed 26 July 2020, <https://www.keele.ac.uk/equalitydiversity/equalityawards/raceequalitycharter/keeledecolonisingthecurriculumnetwork/#keele-manifesto-for-decolonising-the-curriculum>.

Background

A Movement is Born

In 2015, the ‘Decolonising the Curriculum’ movement was sparked by students from the University of Cape Town in South Africa. Fuelling a controversial social media campaign, #Rhodesmustfall called for the removal of Cecil Rhodes’ statue.² The movement aimed to interrogate Rhodes’ legacy and the broader structure of British colonialism. His glorification, along with other ‘imperial heroes’ who acquired much of their wealth through the institution of slavery, led to an erasure of the brutal realities of the British Empire.

Cecil Rhodes’ statue fell in Cape Town (and will soon fall in Oxford).³ This is testimony to the transforming student demography and the widened participation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students in the student community.⁴ However, BAME voices continue to be silenced, whilst their presence at universities is simultaneously used to signify the university’s commitment to inclusivity and diversity.⁵ Rhodes remained standing because institutional heads refused to acknowledge the problematic history of his statue and the message this sent.

Other campaigns such as ‘Why Is My Curriculum White?’ led by the National Union of Students (NUS) called into question the structure of university curricula by challenging the ‘dead white men’ narrative. This was a response to another student-led initiative at University College London (UCL) that expressed frustration with the centrality of ‘white ideas’ in how knowledge was presented to students.

Decolonisation and Diversification

It is important to understand that decolonisation is not diversification. Diversity and inclusivity are essential, but they have come to typify a very corporate, and somewhat banal, term that institutions use to advertise in the market of education. In post-1992, universities in the United Kingdom came under increasing pressure to ‘diversify’ student and staff communities, leading to an incorrect assumption that diversification equated to decolonisation. In reality, however, decolonisation has a

² Elizabeth Charles, “Decolonizing the Curriculum,” *Insights* 32, no. 1: 24 (2019)

³ Aamna Mohdin, Richard Adams, and Ben Quinn, “Oxford college backs removal of Cecil Rhodes statue”, *The Guardian*. Accessed 30/07/2020
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jun/17/end-of-the-rhodes-cecil-oxford-college-ditches-controversial-statue>

⁴ ITV Report. 2020. “Oxford University takes on more BAME students”. ITV. Accessed June 20 2020,
<https://www.itv.com/news/meridian/2020-01-13/oxford-university-take-on-more-bame-students/>

⁵ Sadhvi Dar, “The masque of Blackness: Or, performing assimilation in the white academe,” *Organization* 26 (3): 432-446 (2018)

rich history as a term. It's core principles have always been to challenge problematic narratives and pedagogies which have been legitimised and maintained through colonialism, imperialism and west-centric narratives.

Western production of knowledge had historically worked alongside colonial practices, determining *what* and *who* could produce legitimate knowledge. Historically, eurocentrism centred around privileging European identity over non-European ones. Higher education continues to uphold eurocentric narratives by centralising European scholarly work over non-European thought. This has only remained possible due to the significance and upholding the structure of whiteness, and contributing to the negative experience of BAME students in higher education.⁶

The Experience of BAME Students in UK higher education

Racialised inequality in UK higher education is a well-known and documented issue which manifests in a number of ways. The disparity ranges from admitting and retaining BAME students to further persisting into graduate education and employment. This is further exacerbated for the most socioeconomically disadvantaged within these groups. Racialised inequalities are even starker when the attainment gap is taken into consideration. It is important to recognise the limitations of the term 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' (BAME) groups in its reduction and homogenisation of minority ethnic students' experiences. Therefore, we stress the importance of disaggregating data and, where possible, we encourage and recommend the disaggregation of ethnicities into more detailed groups.

The racialised inequalities in higher education cannot be understood without taking into consideration other factors. It is an extension of a deep-rooted structural issue present in the United Kingdom. Several efforts have been commissioned to tackle these racial inequalities. These include: the Scarman Report on the Brixton Riots, the MacPherson Report on the murder of Stephen Lawrence, The Victoria Climbié inquiry on safeguarding, the Zahid Mubarek inquiry, the Windrush Scandal Lessons Learned Review and the recent Public Health England inquiry into the disproportionate death rates of Black and Ethnic Minorities from COVID-19.⁷

In August 2016, the government launched the Race Disparity Audit to understand and assess racial inequalities present in Britain's public service.⁸ The report noted significant racial injustices in all areas of public life spanning from health and education, to employment, housing and the criminal justice system. The audit found that these persistent and extensive racial inequalities vary by ethnic group

⁶ Sarah Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. (London: Duke University Press, 2016), 17.

⁷ "#weneedanswers," Ubele, accessed 26 July 2020, <https://www.ubele.org/weneedanswers?cv=1>

⁸ "Race Disparity Audit", Cabinet Office, accessed 26 July 2020.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/686071/Revised_RDA_report_March_2018.pdf.

and are more significant for Black, Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups, and less so for Chinese and Indian groups. The data shows, for instance, that Black men are almost three and a half times more likely to be arrested than white men; around one in ten adults from a Black, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Mixed background were unemployed compared with one in 25 white British people; Asian, Black and those in the 'Other' ethnic group were more likely to be poor and were most likely to be in persistent poverty. The racial inequalities experienced by BAME students in UK universities is an extension of what their communities experience in their everyday life.

The BAME attainment gap shines a light on the racialised inequalities present in UK higher education. It refers to the attainment difference between the proportion of white UK-domiciled students who are awarded a first or upper second degree and the proportion of BAME students who are awarded a degree of the same class. The latest data shows the BAME attainment gap is 13.6%,⁹ with the largest gap between Black and white students. Even though common factors such as the student's age, sex, course and qualification on entry are controlled, the difference in degree outcomes persist. The Office for Students suggests this is due to other factors such as institutional structures and the curriculum.¹⁰ The attainment gap has long lasting implications for BAME students either when they are pursuing further study and/or employment.¹¹

How Universities have Tackled Racialised Inequalities in Higher Education

There have been several demands for the higher education sector to tackle its racialised inequalities. In 2011, the NUS published its Race for Equality report which highlighted a range of societal and institutional barriers Black students face in higher education.¹² Similarly, in 2015, the Runnymede Trust published the Aiming Higher report outlining the continued inequalities faced by BAME students from admissions and degree attainment to curriculum content and the promotion of BAME academic staff.¹³ In February 2019, the government launched measures to drive change in tackling inequalities between ethnic groups in higher education.¹⁴ Some of the measures included encouraging institutions to address racial

⁹ HESA, "What are HE students' progression rates and qualifications?", accessed 26/07/2020
<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/outcomes>

¹⁰ Office for Students (2018) "Topic briefing: Black and minority ethnic (BAME) students", accessed 26/07/2020

www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/145556db-8183-40b8-b7af-741bf2b55d79/topic-briefing_BAME-students.pdf

¹¹ Nigel Keohane, and Kathryn Petrie, "On course for success? Student retention at university". London: Social Market Foundation, accessed 26/07/2020

<https://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/UPP-final-report.pdf>

¹² NUS, "Race For Equality", accessed 26/07/2020

www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12350/NUS_Race_for_Equality_web.pdf

¹³ Runnymede Trust, "Aiming Higher: Race, inequality and Diversity in the Academy", accessed 26/07/2020

<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Aiming%20Higher.pdf>

¹⁴ Cabinet Office, "Universities Must Do More To Tackle Ethnic Disparity", London: Cabinet Office, accessed 26/07/2020

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/universities-must-do-more-to-tackle-ethnic-disparity>

disparities in their workforce to holding universities to account through the powers of the OfS. The OfS has set a sector wide target to “eliminate the unexplained gap in degree outcomes (1sts or 2:1s) between white students and Black students by 2024-25, and to eliminate the absolute gap (the gap caused by both structural and unexplained factors) by 2030-31.”¹⁵

Many universities have made an effort to address this gap. In May 2019, Universities UK (UUK) and the NUS published the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student attainment at UK universities: #closingthegap report with the help of 99 universities and students’ unions.¹⁶ Its aim was to help universities address their own BAME attainment gaps by identifying the most significant steps needed for success in reducing attainment differentials. The report requested universities to: recognise attainment differences and set specific targets to reduce them; have a greater awareness among university staff on how to support BAME students; have a greater insight into BAME students’ perceptions, including where these are linked to students’ sense of belonging; have an appropriate disaggregation within the broader BAME category, ensuring practices and initiatives reflect that this ‘group’ consists of individuals with varied experiences and needs.

At present, BAME staff are overrepresented on precarious contracts in comparison to their white counterparts¹⁷ and student wellbeing environments rarely cater to the actual needs of BAME students. Institutions have failed to acknowledge (and tackle) problematic views of students, and this has only been furthered through eurocentric curricula. Universities have continually ignored the institutional silencing of minority voices, and placed greater priority upon hiring white academics. Shockingly, there are only 0.4% Black professors in UK universities. Decolonisation seeks to tackle these issues, but this is not possible without universities actively engaging in the decolonising the curriculum movement.¹⁸

Decolonising the curriculum requires making the invisible visible for all to see, despite how uncomfortable the journey may become. It ensures that the institutions which perpetuate the cycle of colonial hierarchies are dismantled. These racist systems must be replaced with ones which ensure people of colour are shown dignity, respect and, most importantly, their security is guaranteed.

¹⁵ “A new approach to regulating access and participation in English higher education consultation outcomes,” Office for Students, accessed 26 July 2020, https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/546d1a52-5ba7-4d70-8ce7-c7a936aa3997/ofs2018_53.pdf

¹⁶ “Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student attainment at UK universities: #closingthegap,” NUS and UUK, accessed 26 July 2020, <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf>

¹⁷ Equality in higher education: statistical report 2018, accessed 26 July 2020, https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/ecu/2018-06-FCU_HE-stats-report_staff_v5-compressed%20%281%29_1579781912.pdf

¹⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (London: University Press, 2017).

Methods

This review used mixed methods to develop an understanding of how the Politics Department could decolonise its curriculum. We gathered quantitative data from a student survey of 100 students and a review of the required reading lists of all undergraduate 2019/20 Penryn politics modules. We collected qualitative data from semi-structured staff interviews, focus group interviews and a survey of undergraduate Politics students.

Student Experience

Our priority was to foreground the lived experiences of students of colour and to privilege their voices in the review. The focus groups were led by two student interviewers and consisted of eight participants each. Each group consisted of a mixture of first, second and third year BAME students, who volunteered to be in the focus group. For the survey, we designed fifteen likert scale questions and included a comment section at the end of each question for students to contribute a longer written answer. The survey was made available to all students because we wanted to learn from the experiences of all Politics students at Penryn.

Staff Interviews

We invited every lecturer in the Penryn Politics Department to participate in a semi-structured interview in order to gain an understanding of their attitudes towards this project as well as strategies they have pursued to decolonise the curriculum. We also engaged with the lecturers on the current barriers and challenges they faced when decolonising their modules. We were able to undertake an interview with every lecturer except one due to scheduling issues.

Module Data

We analysed the 44 modules offered at Politics Penryn during the 2019/20 academic year. We chose to concentrate on each module's essential and/or required reading list. This was based on the assumption that many students will focus on the required reading. For our analysis, we quantified the data into the following datasets: the author's gender, the number of *Google Scholar* or *Researchgate* citations that the author had, the institution they worked at, the country this institution was located in, and the country of origin of the author. We gathered this data from *Google* searches, *Google Scholar* and *Researchgate* profiles, and *Wikipedia* entries. Any missing data was coded as *N/A*.

Findings

Module Data Analysis

In 2019/20, the Penryn Politics Department taught 44 modules. **Our analysis revealed that of the 1373 authors included in the required reading lists, 1028 were white, which was 80% of the total authors** (see Figure 1).

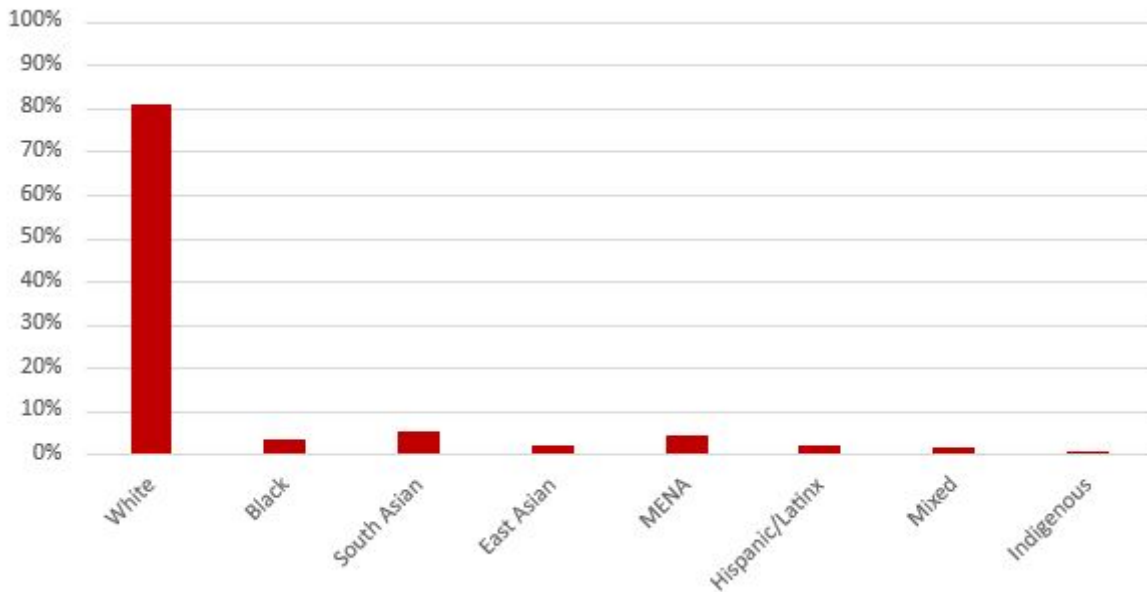


Figure 1: Ethnic background and gender of all authors

Concerning BAME authorship there was a severe lack of representation, particularly within first year modules. It is important to highlight that students first encounter the culture and norms of higher education during their first year. **In first year modules, 86% of the authors were white** compared to 77% for second year modules and 82% for third year modules.

The under-representation of BAME scholars across some modules reading lists was a prominent concern. We found that of the 44 modules taught in 2019/20, **5 modules had no BAME authors, and 6 modules had only 1 BAME author** within the required reading list.

Turning to a gendered analysis, 843 of the 1373 authors on required reading lists were men, representing **66% of all authors** while **33% were women and 0.16% were non-binary** (see Figure 2).

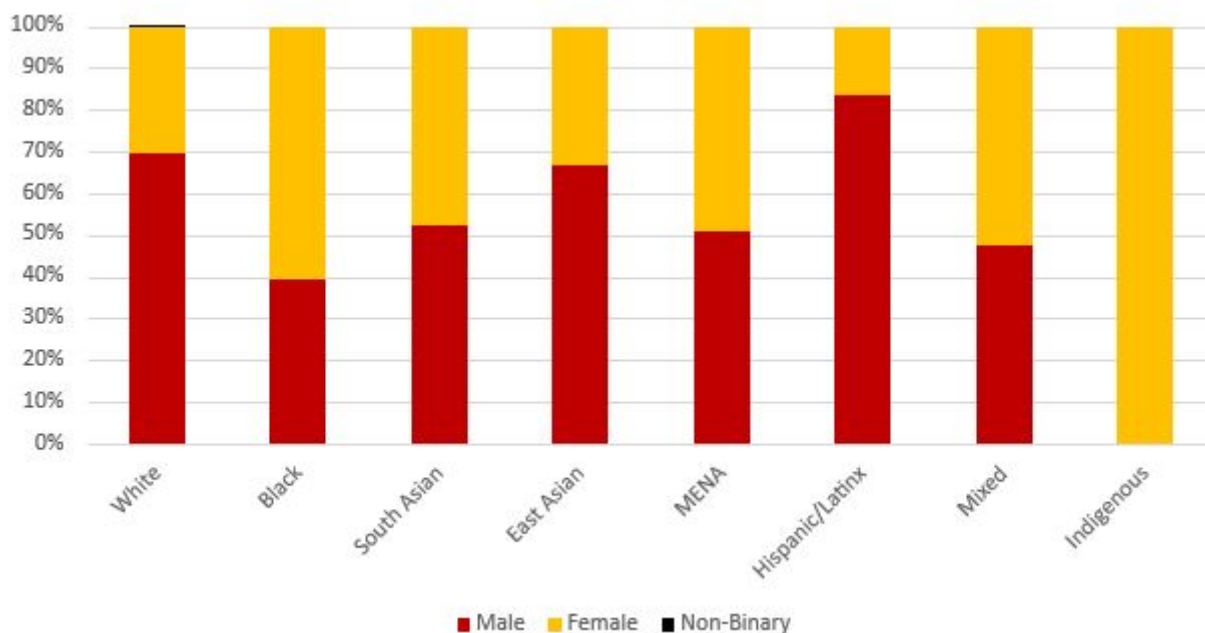


Figure 2: Gender of authors for each ethnic background

The statistics regarding the global positionality of institutions reveals the dominance of the United States as the primary institutional location of authors being read in Politics Penryn modules. **40% of authors were based at universities from the United States**, compared to **21% of authors from the United Kingdom**, **6% from countries in Asia** and **1% from the African continent** (see Figure 3).

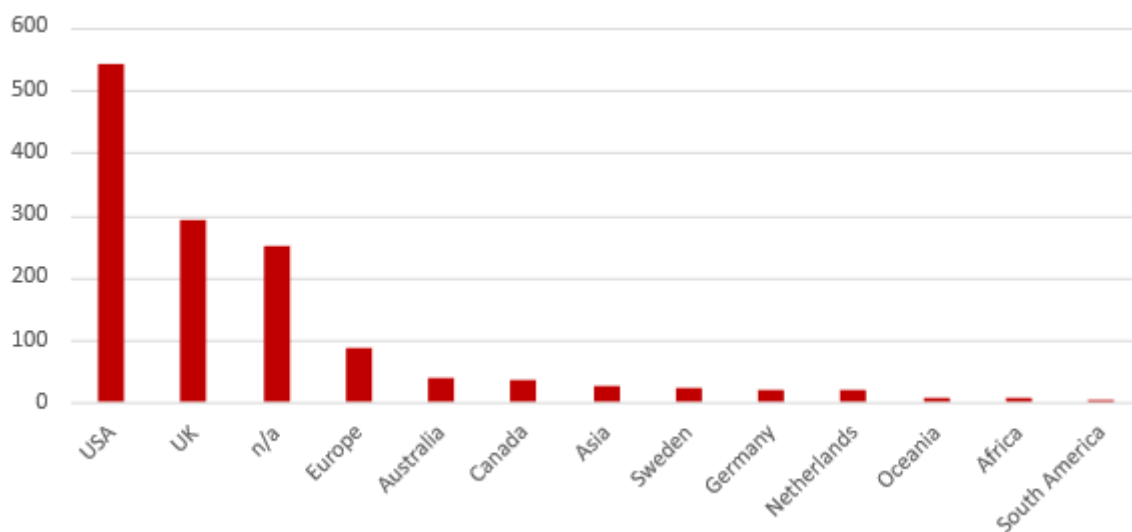


Figure 3: The institutional Affiliation of Authors by Country

Student Attitudes

This section examines students' attitudes towards the current state of the curriculum and discusses the findings from the student survey and the focus group interviews. Our data reveals that the curriculum is overwhelmingly eurocentric and dominated by white scholarship, leading to the potential exclusion of BAME students on account of their race, background and experiences. Although it is encouraging to see the department has taken steps to address these issues, the problem still persists. Students in the focus groups raised concerns of white privilege and racism within the classroom, which remained unchallenged by module convenors. The under-representation of BAME staff was also a recurring theme across our review. Further, it was found that the lack of BAME staff negatively affected student experience.

Key findings from BAME students

- Overwhelmingly, 80% of BAME students consider that European or Western knowledge was framed as “mainstream” while others tend to be considered “criticisms” of this tradition;
- 50% of BAME students feel alienated or othered by the reading lists of the modules.
- 45% of BAME students feel racially excluded from the university.
- Only 20% feel like their background and experiences are reflected in the curriculum.
- 65% report that the under-representation of BAME staff adversely affected their experience.

Eurocentrism and the “White Curriculum”

Findings from the survey indicated that BAME students feel excluded from the curriculum, and could not personally relate to the module content. **80% of BAME students felt that European or Western knowledge was framed as “mainstream” while others tend to be considered “criticisms” of this tradition:**

Students felt postcolonial theory and issues of race, racism and slavery were sidelined in modules. BAME students that studied modules which directly addressed issues of colonialism stated that they felt more engaged with the content as it reflected their lived experiences.

“... they would have a topic and have one slide of postcolonial critiques with three points and that's it. I feel like, even if they just spend more time in whatever they're doing in actually engaging with

students about postcolonial thoughts rather than something you glance over just to have it in there. It will fall back onto the student to do their own research on what they were and were not taught in class.”

“... there are very few modules which actively seek to teach non-Western schools of thought. The majority of students are not challenged, and despite the existence of these very few modules, the majority of students still do not learn a lot of non-Western schools of thought.”

Additionally, another student explained frustration over the way in which 'knowledge' is reduced to whiteness, perpetuated through a eurocentric curriculum which seldom pays homage to the works of Black female scholars.

“...I remember a lecture our group had this year, and I remember just one slide being about Black feminists and then [the lecturer] moved on, and I thought at that moment I just wanted to leave. I was thinking, “how can you champion yourself on feminism and then do one slide on Black feminists?”

The student felt that while Black women's voices were featured within that particular module, it was viewed as secondary to white feminism. Alienation resulting from a lack of representation is a recurring theme throughout the responses provided by students and is an important mode of contention which must be addressed.

Similarly, many emphasised the damaging effect of the eurocentric curriculum on the student body:

“... one BAME staff member, in my experience, has gone to great lengths to educate students to understand that non-western theories are knowledge productive forms themselves, however, the problematic view that anything non-mainstream is merely 'critical', remains with a majority of the student body.”

“the problematic position comes when students who themselves have problematic views, regarding race and gender, are totally avoiding critical theory modules that will challenge these opinions. Instead, students who are already allies and critical theory scholars themselves are taking these modules. There needs to be more engagement with students who hold these problematic views.”

BAME students are often marginalised as a result of the eurocentric curriculum. Most participants addressed the issue of postcolonial thinkers and modules which were simply viewed as optional, reducing their significance:

“due to the optional nature of these decolonial, feminist modules, my own problematic views have taken time to be challenged. If I had to voluntarily search out ways that I was wrong, and my journey in doing so meant I was surrounded by allies and other BAME scholars, then that means that the majority of students themselves have not been similarly challenged. This is extremely problematic as I have heard comments from certain students proclaiming of the need for the re-institution of the British Empire to fix the world’s problems”

“these topics are definitely covered in a range of optional modules, but certainly not in core modules. As I noted prior, the majority of students taking these optional modules are already allies in some way or are BAME students trying to understand their background.”

For many, modules within the department rarely offer intellectual resources necessary to challenging and critically analysing mainstream assumptions perpetuated through Eurocentric thought:

“I feel that whilst we are often reminded of our Western bias, we are rarely actually taught the different ways of thinking. We are sometimes encouraged to think outside of the Western bias but rarely are we given the tools to properly do so... I think preconceptions, taken for granted assumptions and dominant forms of Western thought should be mentioned in lectures more.”

Racism and White Privilege

This section of the review focuses on BAME students encountering racism and White Privilege in academic spaces. BAME students reported a number of instances of ignorant and insensitive statements made in lectures and seminars that legitimised slavery and colonialism.

“I do recall a seminar in first year where a student was saying that colonialism aided Africa. I didn’t feel obliged to respond to him and the [students] jumped on his back straight away which was good to say I haven’t had anything like that as well...”

“...we were all in the first half of first year. So everyone was still getting to know each other. Yes of course white privilege plays a massive role... the fact that he thought it was an OK comment to make, probably means he’s never experienced it or understood racism or colonialism”

Others also recognised how white privilege plays out in the classrooms. Many spoke candidly about their interactions in lectures and seminars, encountering white students recentering their ‘white guilt’ by evading topics of race and racism. Below are extracts of some participants discussing white privilege, racism and

being gaslit by white students who disregarded their perceptions:

“...how long do we have to deal with this white guilt?’ or ‘how long do we have to talk about this’ when we talk about imperialism. Again, we were in first year as well, and no one really knew what to say.”

“I was having a conversation with a boy [in my class] in September and he kind of thought that he doesn’t really have white privilege because he hasn’t seen/experienced racism and went on to say it doesn’t exist now.”

It is extremely worrying to see lecturers and module convenors not intervening or challenging white privilege within the classroom settings. The impact for BAME students can often be severe. One student shared their experience of how it disempowered other BAME students from speaking up, due to lecturers not challenging this behaviour. The environment leaves BAME students feeling isolated and unsupported by the very institutions that should be protecting and supporting them to feel welcomed and accepted into the Exeter ‘community’.

Other respondents of the survey raised further concerns about being invisible and not having a direct voice within the Politics Department. **50% of BAME students believe that they do not have a voice within the Department.** While others expressed frustration and cynicism towards the University statement with regards to Black Lives Matter movement in tackling systemic and institutional racism that is all too prevalent in our university:

“even if they were voiced the university wouldn’t do anything. They would send another email saying how they ‘admonish racist behaviour #blm’, then pat themselves on the back for their woke efforts.”

“as a BAME student, nope. Yes, I agree with the concept of this project, but the issue lays on the fact that there will always be students who won’t be willing to listen. As a short anecdote, the number of times I have heard a white classmate say that they do not believe in white privilege as an existing issue; that the lecturers ‘hates’ white people (it was a very interesting lecture on colonialism and slavery); that lecturers should ‘read the room’ because most of the students in our class are white. It is disheartening. It is an almost unbreakable chain.”

Nonetheless, some shared that some lecturers provide encouragement and a space for them to express themselves:

“the only platform I feel we have is specific lecturers who go out of their way to give us a voice.”

“the presence of BAME academics makes it easier for BAME students to speak out. It doesn’t change the fact that BAME students may still be scared to speak out about issues within the department due to fears of being silenced, shut down or seeming “too aggressive.”

Racial Exclusion

This theme focuses on BAME students’ perceptions of feeling excluded from the university based on their race. It concerns a lack of racial diversity among the staff at the university and the experience of students being a minority in a predominately ‘white institution.’ Our research found that **45% of BAME students feel excluded from the university on account of their race.**

Firstly, many of the participants spoke of the lack of consideration for BAME student needs on campus, for example:

“there’s a stark lack of diversity in the teaching staff and the diversity and inclusion officers are women which is good but they’re white, and instances of racism at the university are handled by white staff members who decide if further action should be taken without having the BAME experience.”

“the university environment is overwhelmingly white. It is very difficult, as a BAME [student], to feel comfortable at all times. There are always reports of racism officially, but even more unofficial reports of racism, and even fights between locals and BAME students. Furthermore, there are very few events made by either the university at wide and the student body, bar events situated around Black history month [for example], and other similar events.”

The participants also noted the curriculum largely excludes Black authors and the feeling of alienation this produces:

“I feel quite alienated from the curriculum on account of race because the only time where Black literature has been represented has been in the context of the US or just in the context of like Africa and so it’s like there’s no attention paid to Black British involvement.”

“it seems very limited in terms of the Black British point of view and it’s kind of like how it was back at school where there is just a focus on America rather than Black British identity.”

For most of us, our time during university is spent on educating others about systematic racism. This was heavily discussed in the focus groups as BAME students felt that their white counterparts needed to work on addressing these issues.

“people shouldn’t rely on people of colour to educate them about it. They should take the steps to educate themselves about racism as it’s a privilege for them to ask us. They’re not allies if they rely on us. We’ve already got problems, so it’s hard, unfair and exhausting to explain to them and teach them.”

“I just think that we should stop giving them excuses and invite new ways for them to feel comfortable enough to speak about race. I find it exhausting that we should have to provide solutions for them when as an academic, you should use your power and make it a necessity for others to speak about race. Judging from first year and second year, it’s only BAME lecturers who provide this platform. It can’t just be placed on one or two slides.”

Inspired by the current Black Lives Matter movement and the recent events surrounding it. There was a need among BAME students to understand the role systemic racism plays in reproducing discriminatory behaviour not only in society but also in university spaces.

“you have to be anti-racist. It’s not enough to not condone racism. Your passiveness is contributing to the problem. A lot of people understand racism as a slur and don’t understand it as systemic and institutional. To be anti-racist, is to recognise how racism is embodied in all these different aspects and how it impedes on the equality of life and how they should actively challenge that.”

“the discussions that we are having, most white people are not privy to that. Most of these white people come from schools with very middle class, even upper class backgrounds where racism doesn’t factor in. So they come to school with very misguided views of racism and what anti-racism is.”

The above points raised by the participants indicate that more work needs to be done by the university on actively becoming an anti-racist institution.

Exclusion based on background and experiences

Unsurprisingly, only **20% of BAME students feel like their background and experiences are reflected in the curriculum** with the majority of the participants feeling like their lived experiences are often overlooked:

“there’s no African or Caribbean history. The closest is South Asian and Indian studies which have nothing to do with my culture or heritage other than ‘Otherisation’”

“as a first-year Black student I feel like there was little if not no reflection of my background - topics like post-colonialism were hardly touched upon to the same extent as other eurocentric topics.”

African studies or Asian studies' thoughts were not spoken about at all."

Some noted that when topics relating to their background and experiences - such as colonialism and the role of the British Empire - were taken into account, they were hastily or problematically covered:

"these issues, unfortunately, are presented as cursory topics of interest to the majority of students in our department's core modules, covering only a slide or two during a core module."

"For example, Africa is often referred to as 'problematic' associated with war, genocide or crime. It's not really looked at for political issues to broaden people's perspective but reinforced stereotypes of African politics."

One student pointed out one of the misconceptions of decolonisation and how figures like Churchill are represented within the binaries of 'hero vs villain'. What is not taught is that he was a white supremacist who believed in eugenics.

"I think it's fine to teach European history but the way it's taught is problematic. There shouldn't be a for or against colonialism knowing how destructive it is. It's what we're seeing with the problems that some extremists are having with the Churchill statue. They're saying 'oh he saved us, we're not speaking German right now,' but not understanding that he created the genocide and killed millions of people. The wording of history to make it sound like it's necessary is problematic and actually worse than the problem."

The student above recognises the need to study European history but challenges the way it is taught. The decolonial agenda does not want to abolish or rewrite history. Instead, it wants to interrogate its assumptions and broaden our intellectual vision to include a wider range of perspectives.

Some suggested that one way the curriculum can be changed to cater to their needs as students of colour is by restructuring and incorporating postcolonial theory throughout the course.

"we had a discussion and noticed how postcolonial theory was at the end of the course, where everyone was either going home or not turning up. So I think that having these modules at the forefront, either at the start of term or making it compulsory rather than optional would make a lot more sense. That's exactly what happens in secondary education. People aren't educated on anything beyond eurocentric education so definitely making something compulsory is one of the first steps."

The under-representation of BAME staff

We recognise the attempts made to increase the representation of BAME staff within the Penryn Politics Department, and we also acknowledge that the wider institution is currently grappling with the renewed focus on diversity and inclusivity in light of the recent BLM protests. However, our findings illustrate that more needs to be done on this front due to how impactful BAME staff are on students of colour.

The focus group interviews and the survey asked BAME students a series of questions regarding the ethnic diversity of the department and whether BAME staff made a significant difference to their experience in higher education. The under-representation of BAME academics at Politics Penryn was a recurring theme throughout the process of this review. The fact of the matter is that the department has *only* one permanent member and one non-permanent member of staff who are people of colour, who also only joined within the last three years.

This highlights a feeling among students that a lack of ethnic diversity in the department was an issue:

“when I came in the first year, there were no staff that were POC or BAME. They were all white.”

“I am surprised that there are only 2 BAME lecturers which I find strange because there aren't just two BAME students so why is there just two BAME lecturers? Obviously I understand that there are possible reasons why BAME lecturers aren't applying to work here but they should still try to actively recruit more BAME staff.”

All of the participants within the focus group recognised how Black, Asian and ethnic minority academics are severely under-represented within the department. The under-representation of BAME academics is not entirely unique to the Penryn Politics department but is an issue that is faced across higher education. A study conducted by Advance HE showed that BAME staff are overrepresented on precarious contracts in comparison to their white counterparts who are more likely to be on permanent contracts or may hold senior management positions, and are paid considerably more¹⁹. There was a discernable common concern among the participants with regards to the lack of BAME academics' career progression in the department and the impact this has on the wellbeing of the staff.

“At present, the tenuous academic position of BAME staff is illustrative of the precarious social position BAME people have in

¹⁹ Equality in higher education: statistical report 2018, accessed 26 July 2020, https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/ecu/2018-06-ECU_HE-stats-report_staff_v5-compressed%20%281%29_1579781912.pdf

general. They worry and fear if they will still have a job at the end of the year...”

Several other participants echoed these sentiments but acknowledged the strides the department has made in actively hiring BAME lecturers. However, **within the student surveys, 65% of BAME students felt that the lack of BAME staff adversely affects their experiences.**

“Not having enough BAME representation makes me feel misunderstood. Without them it would be difficult for me to turn to someone much older who understands and can give me advice if I want to write about such related issues like race, colonialism, etc.”

Some also shared that the presence of BAME staff gave them the tools and language to challenge problematic behaviours. Being the only minority in a classroom can be an isolating experience for some students particularly in first year; there was a perceived risk of not being supported by peers, lecturers or not wanting to come across as “too aggressive” or “too sensitive.”

“I don’t know, they make you feel like you’re not crazy. For example, you’re trained that if you hear something, you might come across too sensitive, especially when it’s racialised comments and you feel that you don’t have the tools to effectively articulate how you feel. They reassure us and equip us with the confidence to do otherwise.”

“...I feel so much more empowered and comfortable to speak to them. Speaking to [LECTURER 2] about Asian feminism, western narratives portray us as poor Asian victims; but she taught me that there’s different narratives. We’re not always the victims, we have more power than the West portrayed us to have. We’re not as submissive as it’s said to be and [LECTURER 2] really empowers me as an Asian female.”

Other BAME participants emphasised the impact of having ethnic diversity in the academic teaching in building student engagement, confidence, empowerment and creating a sense of belonging in a “white institution.”

“the presence of BAME staff is very comforting in that it has made me realise that I’m not crazy and that the microaggressions that I hear aren’t normal. If anything, they’ve helped me understand that my silence unfortunately was normalising these microaggressions, and enabling these racists to win. That crystallised to me the need for voices who have been there, done that and who are still doing it to assist us in making our voice louder – it’s not that we don’t have a voice, it’s that we don’t know how to utilise our voice yet. Without staff like [LECTURER 1], I wouldn’t know how to use my voice like many of the people here.”

Staff Interviews

Lecturers recognised the need for the curriculum to be decolonised however, many highlighted several barriers and obstacles:

- **Lack of time and resources:** Most lecturers noted that they do not have the time or resources to commit to the decolonial agenda.
- **Lack of adequate training:** Most lecturers were supportive and willing to decolonise their modules but were admittedly unsure of where to start. While others did not see the relevance of decolonisation in relation to their modules. We believe that this is due to a lack of training and understanding of what decolonising the curriculum entails.
- **Discomfort in discussing issues of race, racism and colonialism:** Most lecturers were unsure of how to engage with these important issues as they were uncomfortable in holding these conversations. Some lecturers held concerns over open discussions which they felt could lead to singling out BAME students.
- **Lack of institutional support:** Most lecturers noted that there is little support given to them by the institution towards decolonisation. Some lecturers stated that if the institution prioritised this agenda, then the lecturers and the department would be more likely to pursue it.
- **Student entitlement and white privilege:** Most lecturers were concerned with how white privilege manifests in the classroom and its role in silencing BAME students. Some noted that certain students attended lectures on critical theory with the sole intention to argue rather than understand these alternative views.

Staff Reflections

The following case studies are reflection pieces drawn from staff within the Politics Department, illustrating their own beliefs and methodologies towards a more decolonised module structure. They highlight their inspirations, successes and self-criticisms regarding their approaches towards issues of race within their respectively taught modules. We hope the readers can similarly draw their own inspirations from these case studies.

Case Study 1: Introduction to Postcolonialism

Last month, students undertaking the 'Decolonising the Curriculum Review', informed me that the module I teach, *Introduction to Postcolonialism*, was being considered as one of the model curricula following a decolonial and inclusive approach. While I was thrilled to learn about this, this also resulted in much introspection. In this module, we begin our discussions with a shared sensibility that postcolonialism as a field of study is intrinsic to understanding world politics and this standpoint helps us to examine the colonial subjectivity and power relations through the intersecting categories of race, class, caste and gender. Introducing students to the pioneering works of Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, Ashis Nandy, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, among other seminal texts, opens up whole new worlds of knowing and understanding. Having said that, this scholarship is laden with internal hierarchies, competing ideologies, and varied responses to the postcolonial condition. Such complexities point to the broad scope for improvement in the 'Introduction to Postcolonialism' module, anchored by the following questions:

Is the 'Introduction to Postcolonialism' curriculum inclusive enough to be considered a benchmark? Have I sufficiently foregrounded knowledge produced by Black and indigenous scholars beyond key texts? As someone drawing his research and teaching from a South Asian context, and as a savarna scholar, have I put the spotlight on the problem of caste discrimination as a global problem? In my effort to highlight the work of scholars in and of the Global South, have I inadvertently provided more space to South Asian scholars of upper-caste background, like Chakravortys, Chatterjees, and Guhas, making it intrinsically a space of the 'twice-born' castes and thereby silencing the Bahujans or non-savarnas, particularly Dalits and Adivasis? It is important to note that the postcolonial scholarship emerging from South Asia, including the groundbreaking and oft-cited work of the Subaltern Studies Collective, has been a space occupied mainly by upper-caste scholars with a few exceptions. Modules examining colonial

subjectivity and marginalisation through categories of race, class, and gender have often neglected the profoundly engaging and compelling scholarship of scholars like Gopal Guru, Kancha Illaiah Shephard, Anand Teltumbde, and Babytai Kamble among others on Dalit subjectivity. Likewise, there is little introspection on the ways in which popular feminist discourses hailing from South Asian academia have nevertheless silenced the diverse understanding of oppression and liberation from Dalit women's perspectives.²⁰ When discussed beyond a South Asian studies context, the debate around caste is often restricted to cursory mentions of Dr Ambedkar's seminal work, *Annihilation of Caste*.

Students in this 'Decolonising the Curriculum' review describe decolonising as a process of 'reorientation of pedagogy' that 'seeks to challenge inequalities.' In solidarity with this spirit, I have been further examining the ways in which my focus on postcolonial-decolonial politics needs to pay more attention to the internal hierarchies it tends to underplay. Despite their focus on categories of race, class, and gender, postcolonialism modules frequently occlude a meaningful engagement with caste and caste-like systems of subjugation around the world. This is compounded by an insufficient engagement with the works of indigenous, and Dalit scholars. By restricting the texts written by Dalit scholars to modules explicitly focussing on India or topics exploring caste violence in South Asia, such an approach reiterates the 'area studies' dilemma. Young scholars like Suraj Yengde, Yashika Dutt²¹ and Chinnaiah Jangam have been instrumental in bringing the issue of caste discrimination out of the regional/area studies realm to the international stage. Their scholarship centred around the problems of inequality and social justice is a significant continuation of developing transnational solidarities between Dalit and Black movements - much like the intersections between Ambedkar, King and Du Bois.

Case Study 2: British Government

Traditionally, British politics in UK universities is taught as a political science module. It is also quite a tricky topic to teach because approximately half of a first year class will be familiar with a political science version of British politics, and approximately half will find this content really new, depending on whether or not they took A-Level politics. Many students who are unfamiliar with the finer details of the institutions of British politics find exploring them quite alienating and routinely struggle to engage with the module. So, something needs to change, and the pandemic offers the ideal opportunity, as things *have* to be done differently in our teaching anyway.

²⁰ "6 Books by Dalit Women Writers Exploring Lives Lived On The Margins Of Caste And Gender", feminisminindia.com, accessed August 24, 2020, <https://feminisminindia.com/2017/04/18/six-books-dalit-women-writers/>

²¹ Amrit Dhillon, "Coming out as a Dalit: how one Indian author finally embraced her identity", *The Guardian*, August 24, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/19/coming-out-as-dalit-how-one-indian-author-finally-embraced-her-identity>

Over the past two years, I've sought to find a way of de-centring the module by beginning with the local, and local politics. But this hasn't worked in the way that I would like it to. However, decolonising the curriculum agenda brings a *completely* fresh (and refreshing) perspective on this dusty topic by infusing it with identity politics – which is also my research specialism. It enables us to locate the institutions of British politics within a historical perspective and I am super excited at doing this.

My plans are to begin the module by exploring Churchill as the archetypal British icon, but problematizing him as *both* hero and villain, saving Britain from Fascism, but *also* the architect of the death of 4.5 million people in India, knowing that they would starve so that he could shore up reserve food supplies for some troops. From here, we can examine the impacts of colonial attitudes on migrants experiences in the post-war years, and how this continues to impact and affect the ability and capacity of many communities to fully participate in British democracy. We ask what this means for British pluralism, and this becomes a theme that we take up throughout the module, exploring diversity and inclusivity throughout British politics. I feel that looking at British politics as a fusion between identity politics and the institutions of government provides a much more well-rounded understanding of how pluralist democracies work - or are supposed to work – and where the gaps are. Which for me, demonstrates how decolonising the curriculum provides us with another set of perspectives that gives us a much richer and more textured way of understanding politics. How exciting for a political scholar! Moving forward, I want to see how it works this year, how the students engage with it, and what we can do next year to make it better.

Case Study 3: Modern Political Theory

The module Modern Political Theory aims to teach first year undergraduate students a series of canonical texts in the history of modern politics from Machiavelli to Marx. It is similar to many others taught across the UK covering thinkers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Burke, Wollstonecraft, Mill, de Tocqueville, and Marx. This was how I was taught a similar module as a student and how I inherited the module upon becoming a lecturer. Inspired by the student and staff-led movement to decolonise the curriculum, and more immediately by my colleagues Manjeet Ramgotra (SOAS) and Simon Choat (Kingston), I endeavoured to make changes to the structure and content of this module. Here, I reflect upon these changes and scope for further improvement.

The module was limited in its presentation of a narrow set of European men as progressively discovering the theoretical origins of Western ideals of liberty and equality embodied in the liberal democratic state. The narrow curriculum failed to cover non-Western thinkers, overlooked colonial contexts, and reinforced racialised inequalities within the university. The result was that students from BAME backgrounds felt alienated by the curriculum and didn't see themselves reflected as legitimate creators of knowledge. Decolonisation requires reflecting

upon how the forces of colonialism and racism have shaped our intellectual traditions and module design.

I began by completely rethinking the overall structure of the module. Rather than introducing a feminist and postcolonial critique in the final weeks of the module, I began with the Haitian Revolution. This enabled a more global and trans-Atlantic perspective on the development of modern politics and to centre questions of European colonialism in class discussions. It reminded us that France did not immediately ban slavery or give up its colonies during the French Revolution and that declarations of liberty at home went hand in hand with the brutal enforcement of empire and domination abroad.

This change in structure led to a more coherent interrogation of themes of empire, race and colonialism in each week of the module. We considered these issues as major themes in the writings of each thinker. One of the main recommended readings that accompanied the primary texts each week interrogated the thinkers' personal participation in colonialism and how their political thought supported global hierarchies of power. Consider John Locke's investment in the slave-trading Royal African Company or John Stuart Mill's life-long involvement in colonial administration. Rather than disconnecting questions of liberty and internal sovereignty from Empire and colonialism these were conceptualised as interconnected processes.

In hindsight, the changes did not go far enough. While several key issues were addressed, the overall structure of the course still centred on a chronological and progressive history of "great men" whose thought formed the backbone of the module. Further changes will be needed to include non-Western and non-white thinkers, to rethink the implicit Eurocentrism of the module and to include other modes of knowledge production and political organisation. The module would also benefit from a deeper interrogation of its own epistemological foundations and with how it fits within a broader politics degree. There are many challenges to decolonising political theory – does one expand, reimagine or abandon the canon? The immediate challenge is not only to expand the canon and to interrogate colonial hierarchies prejudices, but to rethink how political knowledge is currently produced and who benefits from the status quo.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this review, this section outlines key recommendations for lecturers, the Penryn Politics Department and the University of Exeter. The road to decolonisation requires a sustained and strategic commitment as well as individual responsibility from everyone at the university. It is imperative for the institution to demonstrate a commitment to strategically embed the issues around decolonising the curriculum beyond this review.

Recommendations to Lecturers:

Recommendation 1: Address the under-representation of BAME authors by reviewing the current reading list of each module to reflect a wider perspective.

- Revising material in the syllabus so that BAME voices are not just add-ons but integrated into the course content.
- Seek to consult students on what kind of content they would like to see.
- Consider the positionality of authors and include more scholars situated in the Global South.
- Consult a wider range of source material and academic publications, particularly those located in the Global South.

Recommendation 2: Restructure modules to centre questions of race, colonialism and empire.

- This will increase BAME participation within modules and help tackle the attainment gap.
- Critically interrogate where knowledge is being produced and whose voices are centred in modules. Ensure voices from the Global South are not merely “criticisms” of the mainstream position or left on the margins.
- Reposition the literature away from the West, and consider other forms of scholarship

Recommendation 3: Employ student interns to assist in co-designing new modules and decolonising existing ones.

- Students can be employed through the Access to Internship scheme (or through other internship schemes) by the department.
- Students can provide assistance to lecturers on the topics, structure, assessments and reading lists of the modules.
- This would increase student voice, engagement and overall satisfaction in the modules.

Recommendation 4: Diversify assessment types to reflect the experiences of BAME students.

- Widen the scope of assessment criteria to also include the lived-experience of BAME students. Presently, the assessments students undertake do not actively reflect their lived experiences, contributing to the distance that they feel from the subjects they study.
- Students should be encouraged to consider academic literature beyond the English language in order to deepen the connection a student has with their work.
- Lecturers should be encouraged to move away from their bubble and also be challenged to consider how other literature and narratives impact their subject.
- Assessments should be formulated to consider how the subject matter impacts the lives of BAME, LGBTQIA+, disabled and working class students, as currently the curriculum does not accommodate for this.

Recommendation 5: Introduce more creative assessments to widen students' skillsets.

- Introduce forms of assessment other than standardised essays. This could include reflective reports, practical assignments, portfolio work, policy briefs and creative assessments.
- Certain non-standard forms of assessment enables students to draw on their own identity and standpoint.
- This will widen student skillsets beyond essay-writing in ways that draw upon students' lived experiences.
- It will also create an inclusive teaching and learning environment.

Recommendation 6: Critically reflect on the issue of decolonising the curriculum through a personal reflection piece and set targets for how you could decolonise your own pedagogy.

- This could include reading new literature, watching films or engaging in discussions with others.
- Every module is different and requires reflective work on how to interrogate the power relations that have shaped knowledge production.
- Setting aside time for this task acknowledges its importance and centrality to creating an anti-racist university.

Recommendations to the Department:

Recommendation 7: Introduce an analysis of issues of race and colonialism into a compulsory first year module.

- Currently, the majority of these topics are limited to optional second and third year modules such as 'Introductory to postcolonialism', or are included in the final weeks of existing modules leading to low student participation. This results in many students never encountering these issues in their degree.

- An introductory first year module such as “Political Analysis” or “Political Communication” should analyse these essential topics.

Recommendation 8: Introduce mandatory training for all staff on how to facilitate discussions around race in an inclusive and safe environment.

- One of the key barriers and obstacles identified within this review was the discomfort that staff and students experience when talking about race and colonialism.
- This training would assist lecturers in challenging racism within the classroom and creating an anti-racist university.
- Lecturers should be aware not to single out students of colour (we are not spokespeople for our race or ethnicity).

Recommendation 9: Improve BAME staff under-representation within the department by reviewing hiring practices and support offered to BAME staff.

- Shortlists should be diverse and have at least 50% BAME candidates.
- Hiring committees should include a BAME staff member.
- The department should ensure that BAME staff are rewarded and recognised through their career progression and this should reflect our society’s racial diversity.

Recommendation 10: Create a Decolonising the Curriculum Committee to oversee future work on this issue in the department.

- This would ensure that the initiative goes beyond this review and provides opportunities for on-going dialogue and change.
- A one year progress report should follow in collaboration with staff and employed BAME student interns.

Recommendation 11: Insert a new section in module feedback forms to include options relating to how decolonised a module is.

- This is to assess the progress of modules transitioning towards decolonisation.
- Module feedback forms should include questions concerning a decolonised curriculum and the presence of BAME authors on reading lists.

Recommendations to the University:

The university must acknowledge and confront institutional racism and white privilege. It is important to recognise this is not the task of BAME students, but an issue which the university itself must tackle.

Recommendation 12: the university should review the under-representation of BAME staff at the university level, with a particular focus on the senior management team.

- Throughout the project, the participants stressed the lack of BAME representation at the university. Specifically, a particular focus needs to be placed on hiring BAME staff in senior management positions.

Recommendation 13: The university should establish a university-wide team to focus on decolonising the university.

- This should not be conflated with EDI and Race Equality initiatives.
- We recognise the limitations of this departmental review therefore, we recommend the university commission a 'Decolonising The Curriculum/ University' report in order to assess the institution's efforts.

Conclusion

This student-led internal department review aimed to develop an understanding of how Politics Penryn could decolonise its curriculum. We sought to illustrate a problem so that others could build on our work. We encourage lecturers, senior staff, and students to engage with these issues and take their own action.

There are serious ongoing issues raised by students and staff that need to be tackled urgently. For lecturers, these issues often involve a lack of engagement with ethnic minority student concerns, and a fear that racism continues to be unchallenged within the classroom. We strongly suggest that university staff become more outspoken in challenging problematic positions and viewpoints that some students may have, as currently too many BAME students feel that they must carry this burden alone.

For the department, there is a serious concern that the literature is too Western, white and male dominated. A dramatic repositioning of the literature must be done in order to re-engage BAME students with the academic environment, as right now we risk losing them. To that end, increasing the representation of ethnic minorities across academic and support staff will contribute to establishing a deeper connection between the curriculum and BAME students.

For the university, the first and most important step, is for the institution, departmental staff, and individuals in senior decision-making roles, to admit that there are problems with institutional racism. Forthcoming resolutions will be incredibly difficult if a sense of denial persists regarding how the institution treats its BAME staff, students and its scholarship.

Some may claim that our objectives are unreasonable, and some may dismiss them entirely. We believe that our demands are both clear and attainable. Simply put, we want to be heard. We do not want to have to keep reminding people why this needs to happen, and we do not want to have to illustrate to people why we are not being heard in the first place.

It is important to remember that there is always work to be done. The process of decolonising the curriculum, and most importantly ourselves, requires a great deal of effort, and these goals will not be reached overnight. Nonetheless, we look forward to hearing your own conclusions and seeing how you can work with us to transform our department, together.

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