

What is it? Introductory title explanation etc.

Title: *Searching for Belonging: Institutional Racism and the 'Silent Crisis' in Higher Education*

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This is the submission that I made in partial fulfilment of my Masters of Laws Degree in Socio-Legal Studies. Please see the abstract below:

Abstract

It is often that when discussing issues around race and racism within Higher Education, people ask, "where is the data?" In this thesis, I look back at some of the contemporary student decolonial movements that have happened across the UK. I share insights from these movements and the experiences of several students from the global majority – their experiences of marginalisation in higher education institutions are very common. This is the data.

Drawing from data collected through interviews conducted with students engaged in decolonising efforts at the University of Kent and my own observations of events hosted by student decolonial groups involved in contemporary decolonial activism across universities in the UK, I discuss how Black People and People of Colour (BPOC) students agree that universities have done very little to support impactful and long-term changes. This has had an adverse effect on students' sense of belonging and by extension their academic outcomes, mental health, and lived experiences. Despite this, BPOC students still find a sense of belonging amongst one another. Though, this does not compensate for the gaps that universities are failing to respond to and does not apply to everyone.

Keywords: Decolonising the university, anti-racism, institutional racism, critical race theory

This work was completed at Kent Law School, University of Kent.

Methodology

This thesis emerges from my involvement in the Decolonise UoK project between students and staff of colour. As part of the project, I was part of a team of 8 focus group leaders who conducted research that was concerned with finding out what students from Black backgrounds and other people of colour felt about their experiences of living with intersectionalities such as race, gender, sexuality on the Canterbury campus. In total we engaged through interviews and other activities, including a group of around 50 students. We drew on Critical Race Theories and approaches to research which I outline further below. In particular, the counter-narratives and counter-storytelling through interviews, art and poetry paints are intended to elevate the conversation around the racialised experiences of BPOC students and to move away from the notion that there is no evidence

of students being treated differently to their white counterparts because of the colour of their skin

I conducted the interviews for this thesis with students who had participated in that action at the University of Kent. The interviewees have been from different ethnic backgrounds and at different stages of their studies.

The research methodology in this thesis combines gathering empirical data through interviews with desk-based research on decolonising student movements. Critical Race Theory forms the theoretical framework in which this dissertation sits, in conjunction with taking a decolonial studies perspective which allows me to highlight the colonialities embedded within higher education.

What resources do you need to implement it?

- Interviews
- Videos
- Art
- Poetry

Evidence of impact (publicly available) (could be qualitative or quantitative)

I was invited to speak at the University of Westminster at their 'Black History Year' about my experiences of being a Black student activist at the University of Kent. I was able to share my thoughts on belonging and activism in the higher education space, and many of the ideas that I had in lieu of completing my thesis.

Storytelling was one of the methods that I used, to share some of the experiences of racially marginalised students in Higher Education, and to highlight their experiential knowledge around issues of racialisation, and to disprove the common idea that BPOC students do not wish to pursue further study.

I have also submitted this thesis and been admitted to an LLM degree.

Activism and Academia Link: <https://youtu.be/1uYOW3I9tYY?t=287>

How can this be implemented in other universities?

The first suggestion is around representation. There needs to be representation for people from racially marginalised groups at board level, and anywhere where there are decisions being made about racially marginalised students.

There needs to be representation for people from racially marginalised groups amongst staff. Students from racially marginalised backgrounds, in particular Black students need to be able to see more people of their race in senior positions, where again, they are able to influence decision making.

There also needs to be representation of racially marginalised groups in the student union – which we have seen many universities do well, introducing a BAME network to amplify the

voices of students. It is important to empower students of all backgrounds to individually and as community members. It is as important to do this as it is to listen to the experiential and professional knowledge of students, staff and people of colour. With adequate resources, they will be in a better position to support transformational change.

Curriculums across the country need to be reviewed and revised where necessary to incorporate different knowledge systems from across the world. Students should be encouraged to learn about different canons from different parts of the world to diversify and further challenge their knowing. We should be able to see more examples of successful academics from the global south being recognised and remunerated for their contributions.

Racism continues to be an issue that affects the belonging of students, and it has an impact on students whilst at university and beyond, often negative. Though my thesis argues that universities are currently not doing enough to support university students, there are several examples in my thesis where you are able to see through the interviews, opportunities where institutions could have supported students of colour better. Universities should improve their communications with student communities to truly understand their needs; they also need to actively engage in critical race theory, decolonial theory and anti-racism to educate themselves about the experience of people of colour living in the UK and beyond. Learning needs to be accompanied by action that supports equitable standards and outcomes for students from racially marginalised communities.