



A Room of One's Own is Not Enough: Decolonising the University Space

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The historicity of processes of knowledge creation must be considered to answer key questions such as: which knowledge is created? By whom? For whom? Whose power does this sustain?

This paper aims to investigate the impact of said historicity and outline the ways in which curricula, institutions and pedagogies can be decolonised to create inclusive, anti-racist, and feminist university spaces. It wishes to draw inspiration from feminist theory and pedagogy to inform this process.

The enquiry will problematise the university as two units of research relating to its functions: firstly as a theoretical space, with a focus on the curriculum and pedagogy, and secondly as a physical space where students, educators, and staff are bodies that move within the historical space of the institution. Shared narratives of historical oppression and marginalisation emerge, together with their modern-day articulations.

Following the blueprint provided by this analysis, practices of resistance and decolonisation will be proposed. These will range from critical, anti-racist, feminist pedagogical approaches, to more practical guidelines such as training of academics and students alike, the improvement of hiring practices and scholarship appointments. The target will be the engagement in the praxis of anti-racism to change the culture of the institution itself, to go beyond diversity and inclusion agendas and incorporate the questioning of assumptions that underpin representation, counter-storytelling, and the tackling of societal, financial, and cultural barriers.

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN IS NOT ENOUGH

Decolonising the University Space

POSITIONING OF THE ARGUMENT

“A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.”
(Woolf 2020, 2)

In her work, recognised as a pillar of feminist thought, Virginia Woolf sheds light on the qualifying truth of women's circumstances as the denial of time and space to produce creative works. This historical truth passed through women's place in society as caretakers and the related asymmetrical division of labour within the household, their financial reliance on a male figure, as well as their inability to have equal access to education as their male counterparts. These barriers are considered by Woolf to be the linchpin of women's patriarchal oppression within society.

Granted the necessary contextual differences and history of liberation efforts between Woolf's early twentieth century and the historical moment of the twenty-first century, systems of oppression are still in place nowadays and continue to shape our lives. These systems act at different levels of society and, as such, are all-encompassing as they operate on notions of gender, class, race, sexuality (Mirza 2015, 2). To borrow from the Gramscian *œuvre*, systems of oppression stem from the principle of hegemony by which all aspects of social reality are moulded by, conditioned by, and in support of one group or class within society (Mayo 2020, 26). Gramsci conceptualises this form of power, borrowing from Machiavelli, as being exercised through two interrelated and co-constructive means: force and consent. The issue of consent within hegemonic theory is of particular interest, insofar as it sheds light on the critical role of education in creating, maintaining, and supporting configurations of power (Mayo 2015, 41-42). Within Gramsci's framework, in fact, consent is created under hegemonic systems through the manipulation of the culture of a society, so that dominant ideology becomes the norm. As such, every relationship of hegemony is identified by Gramsci as being inherently educational, and thus at the heart of understanding systems of oppression, and social and political transformation (Gramsci 1971, 666).

It is in this framework that universities, as educational institutions, must be problematised. University is intrinsically a *locus* of power since the institution's *raison d'être* is the creation of knowledge, the root of the aforementioned dominant ideology. Inherent in the process of knowledge creation lies the potential for oppression. Knowledge creation is not an a-political, a-historical process that takes place in a vacuum. On the contrary, it goes through socialisation, externalisation, combination, and internalisation (Siadat 2012, 848-849). Socialisation is the result of a general consensus on the meaning of expressions and concepts and as such, experience, as well as observation and imitation, are key factors at this stage (Siadat 2012, 848). Externalisation signposts the materialisation from implicit to explicit knowledge, by the ways in which said knowledge is released in the social environment, e.g., academic papers (Siadat 2012, 848). Combination represents the *fulcrum* of day to day activities in the university, i.e. the process through which different externalisation of knowledge are brought together to create systems of knowledge (Siadat 2012, 848). Lastly, through internalisation, explicit knowledge becomes implicit again, as the distributed explicit knowledge is internalised by the individual participating in the system (Siadat 2012, 849). All these levels continuously interact with and re-create each other.

The process of knowledge creation, arguably in a similar fashion as universities, does not hold inherent normative value. Nevertheless, its historicity must be taken into account to answer key questions: which knowledge is created? By whom? For whom? Whose power does this sustain? Since their creation, universities have been a product of their time, embedded and supportive of the oppressive systems in which they were created. The critical analysis provided by Virginia Woolf is but one example denouncing this historical truth: universities have historically been characterised as male institutions, since only men were allowed

to attend or teach (with notable exceptions), and white institutions, for similar reasons. The latter feature was proper only of universities in the West/Europe, as flourishing and significant academic contributions were made in non-white institutions; nonetheless, the mainstream discourses in most fields of study reflect only the white dominant discourse. Nowadays, in most cases, systems that sustain these inequalities act through less visible means. Women and ethnicised individuals have been allowed to partake in academic life, both as student and educators. However, the history of oppression seems to still be prevalent, indicating that these inequalities are yet to be overcome.

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to outline ways in which curricula, institutions, and pedagogies can be decolonised to create inclusive, anti-racist, feminist university spaces. It wishes to draw inspiration from feminist theory and pedagogy to inform this process.

This enquiry starts off by identifying two ways to problematise the university, relating to its functions. Firstly, it shall consider the university as a theoretical space by focusing on the curriculum and pedagogy. This will lead into a discussion on which narratives are present in the main discipline groups, by way of further qualifying the Gramscian argument of cultural hegemony introduced. Part of this analysis will also be an investigation on the modality of introduction of non-Western/non-male narratives and the related areas of study. Drawing from the concept of “epistemic violence” introduced by Heidi Safia Mirza (2015, 4), the risk of creating a counter-memory in academic discourses will be presented as the difficulty for non-dominant narratives to occupy a historical space, as well as their marginalisation.

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Secondly, the university will be considered as a physical space in which students, educators, and staff are bodies that move. This shift in perspective will naturally open up the discussion on the past systemic exclusion and segregation of ethnicised bodies – those of students and professors – in higher education, leading to considerations on modern mechanisms of oppression such as tokenism and marginalised inclusion. While past systemic exclusion embodied overt methods for the dominant ideology to exclude and oppress, modern-day practices expose those less visible means by which inequalities and systems of oppression are still sustained nowadays. In considering modern practices, this essay shall problematise the strategy of diversity and inclusion as a form of “conservative modernisation” (Gillborn 2006, 11) as well as a form of policing that assimilated ethnicised bodies have to still endure within the institution.

Following the blueprint of the first two sections, the last two will also be considering the university as a physical and theoretical space, yet with a different aim: to introduce practices of resistance and decolonisation in practice. As such, drawing from the insights of Paulo Freire (2000) and bell hooks (1994) on critical pedagogy, suggestions will be brought forward on ways to decolonise the university as a theoretical space. Specifically, this will inform the use of critical approaches within the various disciplines, as well as university-wide practices, in order to dismantle systems of oppression within the cycle of knowledge creation (see Section 1.0). At this point, a further problematisation of area studies will be brought forward in order to invite the dismantling of the colonial legacy in academia in the study of non-Western realities. Meanwhile, in the consideration of university as a physical space, more practical guidelines will be offered that partake the creation of anti-racist, feminist spaces in the university’s physicality. These will range from specific trainings for academics and students alike, the improvement of hiring practices and scholarship appointments. Overall, this section will focus on the engagement in the praxis of anti-racism in order to change the culture of the institution itself.

Ultimately, this essay wishes to investigate the main barriers that prevent universities from being inclusive, anti-racist, feminist spaces, and to outline ways to positively overcome such barriers. At this stage, it is worth noting that this project does not wish to be a comprehensive account or rule book for decolonisation, nor does it have the ambition to provide an exhaustive, unproblematic understanding of systems of oppression in academia. As Gillborn denotes, racism, and similar

systems of oppression, prevent this due to their complexity, contradictory, and ever-changing nature (2006, 26). Nevertheless, this essay wishes to suggest a move past this and open up a conversation by highlighting the necessity of engaging in these issues to overcome the current limits of the academy, to ensure a sustainable and effective inclusion of all voices.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

Calls for decolonisation of the university have been widespread, with student-led movements gaining significant traction since the early 2010s, with notable examples in South Africa (Heleta 2018) and the United Kingdom (Peters 2018). Before being able to delve into the reasons for decolonisation and some of the techniques to achieve it, it appears pivotal to tap into the definitional question of what constitutes “decolonisation”. The concept itself has become the collection of multiple definitions, each rooted in the specificity of the context it is applied to, as well as the aims it wishes to achieve. In the context of this analysis, the framework provided by Bhambra, Gebrial and Nişancıoğlu shall be used in describing decolonisation as a way of re-contextualising the experience of colonialism (and the interconnected experience of racism) as “empirical and discursive objects of study” and simultaneously offering alternative ways to conceptualise the world and de-centralise European experiences (Bhambra, Gebrial and Nişancıoğlu 2018, 2). It is not of secondary importance that students in South Africa and the United Kingdom are at the forefront of the calls for decolonisation since the education system (and wider society structures) were shaped by the colonial experience of the British empire. As such, these are but two examples where the linchpin of colonisation in the academy, i.e., Eurocentrism and the white-male hegemonic status quo, is reproduced in accordance to said colonial history. As such, decolonisation does not partake solely in the recognition and deconstruction of “standard understandings” but also in their transformation to construct a new universality (Bhambra, Gebrial and Nişancıoğlu 2018, 2). This new universality will be characterised by the recognition of the all-encompassing structural importance of colonial history for modern society in order to open up its range of knowledge for the equal and respectful inclusion of a plurality of experiences. Thus, the process of decolonisation wishes to transform the terms upon which universities exist, in theory and praxis.

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Approach I: University as a theoretical space

Universities are primarily institutions where knowledge is created, shared, and reproduced. This knowledge ultimately has a real impact on the world through a number of routes: policy, socialisation, economic structures, etc. (Mohanty 1994, 335). To posit that the history of colonialism and racism influences this knowledge thus highlights the urgency of addressing this issue, beginning with the theoretical expression of this influence.

The first example of colonial influence within the university is the systemic erasure of non-dominant discourses, first from the academy at large and, later, from the mainstream. This particular mechanism took different forms across various disciplines and throughout history, nevertheless some common factors can be identified. At the heart of this lies the idea that theory and knowledge are produced solely in the West, and that it rests upon the contexts outside of the West to apply these theories (Heleta 2018, 50). This principle represents the embodiment of the continuing legacy of oppression, insofar as it is rooted in the belief used to legitimise and support colonial administration: other cultures and systems of knowledges were inferior to the European/Western knowledge system (Dreyer 2017). During the colonial period, this gave *carte blanche* to Western epistemology to posit that knowledge is independent of the specificity of the geohistorical and biographical condition upon which it is produced (Dreyer 2017, 3). In other words, as Mignolo (2011) presents, the knowledge and experience from the particular geohistorical location of Christian Europe/West and created under the specific biographical conditions of Christian white men living in this location, is universal. It is in this claim of universality that oppression continues to be reinforced.

A poignant example of this claimed universality is found in most social sciences, one example for all being the theorisation of the state. The state is arguably the fundamental unit of the discipline of international relations, and, upon it, most realms of theorisation within the discipline and its adjacent disciplines are built (Dunn 2001, 46-47). As the main features of the conceptualisation of statehood, the notion of territorial sovereignty has its roots in the historical development of nation-states in the European political landscape of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, specifically tied to the experience of the Thirty Years' War that engulfed the European continent from 1618 (Dunn 2001, 59). As such, this is the recognised moment of formalisation of a key feature of the new political entity, the Westphalian state: the principle of sovereignty according to which the state has primary control over the affairs of its territory (Croxtton 1999, 570). Despite the singularity of circumstances which lead to this definition, statehood is a widely used concept and often assumed as a-temporal and unproblematic (Dunn 2001, 55). However, the application of this theoretical framework becomes problematic when considering countries that do not share the same historicity. This is where infantilising concepts and normative judgments, such as notions of state fragility, failed state, etc. are born, to then operate in dangerous ways. Following a similar pattern to how Western colonisers justified colonialism by means of identifying non-Western identities as inferiors, so do modern day claims of state fragility continue to support this notion.

Similarly to the ways in which non-Western experiences are excluded from the mainstream realm of theorisation, so are non-male perspectives. The understanding of how the fundamental units of international relations – the states – operate, within themselves and with each other, is rooted in instrumental rationality, the linchpin of rational choice theory (Tickner 2005, 2177). This approach can be traced back to the influence of the Enlightenment, the pan-European movement that spread during the seventeenth century, which was characterised by the cult of the rational individual, of reason more than intuition as the dominant form of knowledge, of the individual as a rational being capable of its own rational choices. Immanuel Kant, forefather of the Enlightenment, described the cultural movement as “man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity” (Kant 1983, 152). This assumed rationality grounded in the European intellectual experience of the Enlightenment was adopted and appropriated by economics, from which international relations borrowed as a starting point for its social investigation (Tickner 2005, 2174). Rationality, as intended here, has thus been historically understood as the attitude of a Western man in the marketplace (Tickner 2005, 2177). The adoption of this specific historicity and the gendered understanding of the realm of international relations, and its interpretation as a-historical, a-temporal, and neutral conceptualisation has excluded any considerations on race, class, gender, historical context, etc. Ultimately, this has favoured the fostering of the dominant power relations that are embedded in the international political order, with white European men at the top (Enloe 2000, 3). To consider gender within this context would be to challenge the epistemological foundations of the discipline itself (and all disciplines reliant on the same foundations) (Tickner 2005, 2177) as well as the real-life systems of oppression attached to it (Enloe 2000, 196-197).

Where non-Western/non-male dominant narratives are included, other correlated problems arise. These are best exemplified in the concept provided by Heidi Safia Mirza of “epistemic violence” (2015, 4) emblematic of the difficulty of non-dominant narratives to occupy a historical space within academia. Heidi Safia Mirza brings forth the experience of Indian suffragettes, whose participation in the movement highlights the principle of epistemic violence operated by Western academia. Firstly, there seems to be collective amnesia around their participation as postcolonial women in higher education, emblematic of the programme within the academy of erasing ethnicised, non-Western experiences (Mirza 2015, 2-4). This example appears thus symbolic of how even within mainstream feminist movements, a tendency of positioning white women as the legitimate objects and subjects of the feminist struggle is prevalent by way of marginalising non-white experiences.¹ Secondly, where these accounts were reported, Indian suffragettes were discursively perceived as racialised, doubled as “exotic”, and sexualised (Mirza 2015, 2-4). This approach historically is particularly prevalent in area studies, where

¹ For marginalisation, see more at section “Approach II: University as a physical space”.

non-Western experiences are analysed from the perspective of the white-male gaze. As area studies became prominent during colonial times in order to inform the colonial process, the field, from the outset, relied on notions of infantilisation of non-Western experiences (Kaltmeier 2017, 48). As the academy largely evolved and incorporated decolonial and anti-racist practices within the framework of area studies, these are left to tackle this heritage where the definition of the geocultural units of study were defined by the European colonisers, and thus centred around Western/European experiences (Kaltmeier 2017, 49).

Approach II: University as a physical space

Heidi Safia Mirza's conceptualisation of epistemic violence and the example of Indian suffragettes resonate even when turning to the historical experience of students, educators, and staff as bodies that operate within the physical space of universities. In fact, non-white non-male bodies were not present on university campuses, except as a subject of study, until the last century following struggles to advocate for inclusion and the right to study in an institution for higher education. These barriers stemmed once again from the colonial/patriarchal dominant ideology that sought to ensure the reproduction and support of systems of oppression. While these were overt methods employed by the dominant ideology to exclude and oppress, nowadays less visible means are used for this purpose. It is worth mentioning that modern-day practices, particularly the process of Othering, were inspired and developed from the old modality of marginalisation.

At this stage, it is worth making some clarifications on the process of Othering, its historical origins and nowadays applications. Othering can be considered the quintessential legacy of colonialism for the way it has shaped and continues to construct modern power dynamics. The mechanism by which othering occurs is characterised by a group attributing negative characteristics to other individuals/groups, to set them apart and to define one's sense of self by way of opposition (Rohleder 2014, 1306). According to Fanon, this translated into the colonial discourse by ways of a "Manichean world" whereby the settler is the embodiment of ethical good, and the Native society is painted as evil (Fanon 1963, 41). Upon this dichotomy is built Abdul JanMohamed's mechanism of "Manichean allegory" (JanMohamed 1985, 68): the othering of people by colonisers, built upon the Other's constructed inferiority, developed into a binary and a discursive opposition between races that endures nowadays (Lomba 2005, 91; Said 1978). In a similar fashion to the colonial discourse, the patriarchal discourse positions women as the opposite of men, as inferior, as Others from the male norm (de Beauvoir 1997). The effects of the process of Othering on a theoretical level appeared evident when discussing international relations, where women and ethnicised individuals – both professors and students – have been historically excluded from the framework of the academy (see Section 3.1).

In addressing the physical space of the university, even more poignant to understand the depth of this issue is consideration on the intersection of these social barriers, i.e., the lived experience of ethnicised women. This lived experience does not fall into neat divisions across race, class, gender, etc., but the intersection between the above must be considered. In fact, theorists have stressed the importance of attention to the intersectionality of social barriers, i.e., the lived experience of ethnicised women. The project of "intersectionality" was aimed at including the experiences of black women in the legal discipline, which drew attention to black women's multidimensionality, and thus the interaction of race and gender as a "double" means of oppression for this historically marginalised and overlooked group (Crenshaw 1989; 1991). This project was later brought forward as a means to understand intersecting social systems of power, how they are constructed, transmitted, legitimated and reproduced in a much broader scope (Hill Collins and Chepp 2013, 59). As such, intersectionality has become a "constellations of knowledge projects", each granting a different and complementary lens to understand power relations (Hill Collins and Chepp 2013, 59). Particularly poignant to this analysis is the ways in which intersectionality has become widely accepted by challenging the epistemological foundations of knowledge projects such as the Enlightenment, rooted in the positionality of knowledge creation from the centre, through taking into account other intersocial locations (Hill Collins and Chepp 2013, 61). From this stems, among other mechanisms, intersectionality's attention to relationality, the

process that allows certain people in various social positions to acquire and hold power in relation to other social positions (Hill Collins and Chepp 2013, 60-61). A practical example of this concept in academia, specifically in the physical space of academic institutions, and how it operates can be found in ethnicised women's representation in these spaces.

Historically, Othering has had the effect of excluding women and ethnicised individuals from academia. Nevertheless, the inclusion of these groups has considerably picked up, particularly for women. Women, in fact, now constitute almost 42% of academic staff in the world (World Bank 2021a). A closer look at the data, however, uncovers continued marginalisation. Women are still present in lower numbers than the dominant male group, with significant variations in non-Western contexts: e.g., only 24% of tertiary education academic staff is female in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank 2021b). Furthermore, even in contexts where female percentage of academic staff is higher, there are significantly fewer women holding senior faculty positions than men (Catalyst 2021). When women do indeed reach senior faculty positions, they earn less than men (Catalyst 2021). The representation and earning gap become even wider when considering ethnicised women (Catalyst 2021).

Where they are indeed part of the institution, women and ethnicised individuals are considered "exotic tokens" to showcase the university's diversity. They suddenly also become natural experts on their identity issue-area and are subject to intellectual casting (Mirza 2015, 3). As they are granted visibility, non-white/non-male bodies in the academy are subject to strong policing aimed at assimilation of their otherness. This assimilation can be all encompassing. It ranges from control over the individual lived spatiality (their bodies, dress code, physical appearance, etc.), how they present themselves in the locus of knowledge, to their tone of voice (Bartky 1990). The policing also incorporates the notion of internal colonisation, whereby the dominant ideology has been internalised by the oppressed and shapes their internal psychology (Peters 2018, 255). The ultimate aim of assimilation is to develop docile bodies (Bartky 1990, 65) of academia, mute visible objects (Mirza 2015, 5) to signpost diversity yet excluded from the mainstream discourses.

RESISTANCE AND DECOLONISATION IN PRACTICE

From the picture painted considering the Gramscian notion of cultural hegemony (Pizzolato and Holst 2017) arises the need to theorise practices of pedagogies to counteract and challenge the workings of the dominant culture (in this case white, male and Western-centric). A foundational contribution is made in this sense by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, who proposes the use of a critical approach to education with the purpose of using it as a means to combat and dismantle systemic oppression. Borrowing from Fanonian and Marxist theorisation, Freire proposes the use of education as a liberatory practice for the oppressed to regain their humanity after the dehumanisation and objectification of oppression (Freire 2000). Building from Freire's notion, bell hooks provides another pivotal contribution to the necessity of rethinking pedagogy to disrupt systemic oppression: that is, the power of education to assert one's freedom from oppression (hooks 1994, 13). As such, education is theorised as a way to "transgress" the boundaries proscribed by systems of oppression and achieve one's individuality (hooks 1994, 7-12).

Approach I: Decolonisation of the theoretical space

The university curriculum and pedagogy are recognised as the primary sites in which dominant systems of oppression are reproduced and shape the individuality of both white/male and ethnicised/non-male identities by way of the misinterpretation of history and the othering of non-white/non-male individuals (Peters 2018, 263). As such, the process of decolonisation within the theoretical space of the university has the primary aim of challenging, questioning, and replacing the dominant systems of knowledge used for oppression.

Primary among these goals is the basic level of challenging mainstream authors as a normal praxis. This is the first and fundamental goal of decolonisation, to challenge the linchpin notion that theory and knowledge are produced solely in

the West. This can be done in two ways. One is by encouraging a critical approach to the mainstream knowledge provided within the discipline. Inviting students to think critically about the origins and limits of the perceived “canon” will not only allow them to understand the colonial/patriarchal roots of the field, but also enhance their ability to approach real world problems from a less inherently biased position. This is particularly important in international relations where overlooking the underlying issues of the discipline, for instance, is proving particularly dangerous as policies that are developed from this framework go on to impact non-Western realities the most (Zvogbo and Loken 2020). Another approach to challenge mainstream knowledge is via the introduction of and focus on currently non-mainstream perspectives in the general curriculum. This does not suggest an additive approach – attaching a few readings at the end of a syllabus – but a deliberate consideration of non-White, feminist approaches into the mainstream curriculum (Zvogbo and Loken 2020).²

The dismantling of colonial legacies can take on a more deliberate approach too, by recognising and attempting to overcome the notion that white knowledge equals universal knowledge in the totalising, mainstream discourses in academia (Heleta 2018, 52). This deliberate project aims to open up other canons of knowledge as a way to displace Western/male centrality as the only possible framework (Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021, 2). The suggested approach is to engage in a plurality of experiences grounded in the context within which knowledge would be operating, and generating a dialogue with the indigenous communities affected (Heleta 2018, 57; Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021, 3-4). This can take different forms in accordance with the specific contexts and disciplines, however some general practices could be employed across these boundaries: these can be the exercise of cultural reflexivity and the embracement of “other(ed)” systems of knowledge (Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021, 3). Of pivotal importance, in fact, is the epistemological approach by which students, researchers and professors operate within the cycle of knowledge creation. Thambinathan and Kinsella highlight the importance of critical reflexivity, a practice by which the researcher must reflect upon the varying power relations that can be prevalent in the socio-political contexts where the research is taking place (2021, 3). This can provide a powerful tool for understanding the researcher’s epistemological assumptions, and the structures of knowledge that inform one’s research questions or desired outcome (Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021, 3). Part of this project is also the embracement of “other(ed)” systems of knowledge to which regard the incorporation within the mainstream of feminist and postcolonial methodological approaches appears pivotal. This would be especially valuable as a guide to unlearn and re-imagine how knowledge is constructed, produced, built and consumed, and thus to truly overcome the epistemological assumptions proper of dominant oppressive cycles of knowledge creation (Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021, 4).

In order to ensure the creation of an inclusive environment and a shift in the culture of the institution, another important aspect to consider is the specific training that might be provided to academics as well as students to approach issues of race and gender. This is interconnected with the previous point on critical reflexivity; however, the purpose is to provide a more targeted approach. The erasure of violent experiences endured in former colonial contexts, the lasting violent experiences of racism by ethnicised individuals, and the historical violence of patriarchal oppression are often discussed in academic context with calls to rationality that centre the safety of those present, specifically the oppressors (Leonardo and Porter 2010, 139-140). Leonardo and Porter poignantly problematise this approach by asking the proverbial question of who is ultimately protected by this approach, and they suggest that, in order to dismantle systems of oppression, there is a necessity for those who benefit from them to be uncomfortable (2010, 139-140). This does not suggest the creation of a place for antagonising, violent debate, but pinpoints the necessity of a Fanonian pedagogy rooted in a humanising form of violence for the disruption of dominant systems of knowledge (Leonardo and Porter 2010, 139-140). This space for debate and discomfort is necessary for those who benefit from systems of oppression to acknowledge and act upon their privilege, and for those who are oppressed as they see themselves as re-centred in the conversation.

2 Suggested literature: Tickner (2005); Enloe (2000, 1-18; 195-202).

Approach II: Decolonisation of the physical space

The processes of decolonisation in praxis and in the culture of the university as an institution of knowledge to overcome systems of oppression can be numerous. For the context of this analysis, three main practices will be brought forward: anti-racism/anti-sexism vs. multiculturalism, hiring practices, and scholarships.

A simple yet effective approach to tackling systems of oppression in universities at the physical level can be borrowed from critical mass theory, i.e., the idea that including within an institution enough individuals from a specific group will change the culture of the institution itself (Grey 2002, 19). Active hiring agendas to increase representation would largely benefit the presence of different discourses (Zvogbo and Loken 2020), as the presence of ethnicised individuals and women would challenge the aforementioned assumptions of white/male knowledge being superior and universal, while also reducing the burden of tokenism and intellectual casting. Most importantly, however, it is pivotal in this context that hiring agendas do not contribute to the marginalisation of non-mainstream identities by assuming that scholars of colour solely focus on issues of race and identities while women only focus on gender issues (Zvogbo and Loken 2020). The diversity that would ensue from active hiring agendas is welcome, yet it must be engaged in with the aim of normalising the presence of non-mainstream identities within the university sphere.

When addressing decolonisation in the academic space, both theoretical and physical, the declaration of intent is vital. To recognise the system of oppression is not enough, to be against racism or sexualised oppression is not enough, an institution must take real steps to be actively anti-racist, anti-sexist (Gillborn 2006, 14-15). There are a number of ways to create the conditions for active anti-oppression, beginning with a problematisation of diversity and inclusion frameworks. Inclusion and diversity agendas have usually entailed the formation of “Diversity Councils”, commissions, initiatives, etc., typically made up of senior administration and teaching staff, with the purpose of documenting issues of diversity, compiling their findings in “diversity action plans” that will ultimately inform the university’s policy for building a diverse and inclusive community (Iverson 2007, 587). While inclusion was an important programme in academia when non-white/non-male individuals did not have access to universities, nowadays a focus solely on inclusion and diversity provides unnecessary limits to what can be achieved by taking an active engagement in creating inclusive, anti-racist, anti-sexist spaces. This is connected to the importance of decolonising the theoretical space of universities. As such, the inclusion of an ethnicised, woman’s body merely represents a signposting of formal equality if it is not accompanied by re-centring non-mainstream narratives and providing them with the right to occupy a historical space (Mirza 2015, 4). Thus, strategies of diversity and inclusion must move away from forms of “conservative modernisation” (Gillborn 2006, 11-12) made up of timid reforms, towards a bolder, more radical, anti-racist and anti-sexist agenda.

What a radical, anti-racist, and anti-sexist agenda would entail can be pinpointed by critically analysing the specifics of certain aspects of diversity and inclusion approaches, particularly to highlight how they are intrinsically complicit in reinforcing and perpetuating the historically constructed racial order (Hu-DeHard 2000, 42). This is achieved in a number of ways, among which three mechanisms appear especially relevant: access, disadvantage, and market discourse. The issue of access is central to diversity and inclusion strategies centred around the idea of “opening access” to ethnicised individuals and increasing their representation in the university (Iverson 2007, 593). While this commitment does not appear problematic on a surface level, it underpins a dichotomy of insider/outsider that uses white and male as the standard against which to measure marginalised groups’ progress, thus in fact maintaining the hierarchies of systems of oppression and power (Iverson 2007, 593-594). Similarly, diversity and inclusion agendas aim to tackle the “disadvantages” of ethnicised individuals by recognising them at risk, before and within the institutions (Iverson 2007, 596). On one side, these threats for ethnicised individuals’ advancement before entering the university are framed as individual deficiencies, e.g., preparation skills etc., and thus fail to critically examine the systemic factors that perpetuate these disadvantages (Garcia and Guerra 2004, 155). On the other, once entering the university, the diversity and inclusion approach to

marginalised individuals threatened by harassment and discrimination is often the creation of mechanisms of support and protection for students. Although these bodies are important, they shift the attention from the sources of discrimination, harassment of violent behaviours (Iverson 2007, 598). It would be crucial to also question the institutional culture that allows individuals to feel comfortable perpetuating discriminatory or violent behaviour.

In addressing the diversity and inclusion agenda's shortcomings for access and disadvantage, a true anti-racist and anti-sexist institution would reframe the problem and use a strategic deployment of the diversity discourse centred around counter-storytelling (Iverson 2007, 603-606). This would entail, firstly, questioning the assumptions of the diversity and inclusion agenda – i.e., reinforcing the mechanisms for momentary solutions to a problem (e.g., support mechanisms for harassment) – and addressing the source of the problems (e.g., the systems and institutional culture that enable discriminatory, racist, sexist individuals) (Iverson 2007, 605-606). Secondly, it would be important to include all sides of the story within the development of policy-making processes around diversity. Diversity and inclusion councils or commissions are oftentimes made up of institutional agents, faculty, senior administrators, etc., and as a result the lived experiences of those affected by the institutions' racialised/oppressive social order slip through the cracks of the dominant institutional perspective (Iverson 2007, 603-604).

As this paper has outlined, racism and the correlated systems of oppression operate beyond the realm of academia by impacting societal, economic, and political frameworks. As such, an anti-racist, anti-sexist, feminist, and radical institution should aim to provide a space where everyone is not only included but provided with the instruments to thrive. Another suggested practice to tackle inherent inequalities in the context of academia would be to develop a structural, transparent, and comprehensive plan to provide financial aid and scholarship to those who are most affected by structural inequalities (Kendall 2021, 105-106). It is pivotal for these scholarship plans to be deliberately aimed and transparent in tackling racial structural inequalities, as well as gendered ones, e.g., the “maternal wall” (Williams 2005, 91;99). This would not only contribute to creating better outcomes in the context of knowledge creation but also aim to tackle forces at societal level that sustain the aforementioned inequalities. This type of commitment however must not be confused with the feature of diversity and inclusion agendas that use scholarships among strategies aimed at showcasing the university's visible commitment to diversity (Iverson 2007, 599). While these are not intrinsically negative policies, they are grounded in the usage of marginalised groups as objects, commodities with an economic value for the institution that aims to appeal to a wider audience (Iverson 2007, 599-600). What is being advocated here is a deliberate, uninterested commitment to the creation of safer, anti-racist, anti-sexist spaces where the university de-centres whiteness, abandons a focus on marketisation, and pledges to support initiatives to create safe spaces for marginalised groups. Part of this approach would be the training of staff in anti-racist and anti-sexist approaches, encouraging discussions around consent paired with strong and clear codes of conduct for students and, even more importantly, for members of the faculty – with strong mechanisms of accountability.

CONCLUSION

Inherent in the theorisation of intersectionality is the idea that only when an institution makes space for and allows the full, equal participation of black women, will systems of oppression truly be overcome (Crenshaw 1989, 159-160). Thus, the struggle for decolonisation goes beyond Woolf's room of one's own and presents to the institutions the urgent, active measures they must consider in order to create truly anti-racist, feminist, safe university spaces.

These measures can be identified in the decolonisation of the curricula, institutions, pedagogies, physical and theoretical spaces of learning.

When considering the university as a theoretical space, a clear trend was highlighted for a need to go beyond considering Western/male knowledge as the dominant framework. The suggested approach for this is the encouragement to challenge mainstream methodological and discourse practices through the introduction

of historically marginalised perspectives and the questioning of epistemological assumption of dominant systems of knowledge.

Associated to the framework of oppression that operates also at the theoretical level, the university as a physical space is found to enforce practices of “othering” such as low representation of marginalised groups, tokenism, harassment, etc. As such, a basic increase of representation is advised, through deliberate hiring practices for this purpose.

For the creation of a deliberately anti-racist, anti-sexist, radical, safe space, more focused policies are suggested that might go beyond the diversity and inclusion agendas, to incorporate the questioning of assumptions that underpin representation, counter-storytelling, and the tackling of societal, financial, and cultural barriers.

Ultimately, this essay aimed to investigate the main barriers that prevent universities from being inclusive, anti-racist, feminist spaces, and to outline ways to positively overcome said barriers.

Once again, it must be stressed that this project does not wish to be a comprehensive account or rule book for decolonisation, nor does it have the ambition to provide an exhaustive, unproblematic understanding of systems of oppression in academia. As Gillborn (2006, 26) denotes, racism, and similar systems of oppression, prevent this due to their complexity, contradictory, and ever-changing nature. Nevertheless, this work wishes to suggest a move past this and open up a conversation by highlighting the necessity to engage in these issues to overcome the current limits of the academy, to ensure a sustainable and effective inclusion of all voices.

Lastly, it might be important to note that although the focus of this paper has been on mainly university-level inequalities, this approach could prove to be reductionist (Gillborn 2006, 18). The aforementioned changes must also be paired with institutional and policy changes at governmental as well as international level, which constitute a venue for conducting further research.

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