Podcast as Powerful Pedagogy

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Introduction

This chapter provides reflections of the podcast series 'Stripping the White Walls' beginning with a reflection by Dr Francesca Sobande on podcast as a powerful tool for pedagogy.

The aims of this podcast were to create a safe space outside of formal environments to freely discuss our thoughts regarding the racialised issues that exist in higher education, then challenge them. Most importantly, the aim was to raise awareness of the racial disparities that exist within the academy so that we can effectively and (hopefully) permanently strip the *White Walls*. We are by no means experts, but young people who aim to educate ourselves and liberate our minds.

The name 'Stripping the White Walls' is a conscious and deliberate metaphor to address and reclaim the representation, voice and space for people of colour in the academy — both students and staff. The title signals the driving force of the podcast to tear down 'whiteness' as the only standard of knowledge and way of being. The podcast is meant to create principled, safe, collaborative space for students to discuss issues of race, gender and sexuality within higher education. Instead of having an 'expert' focus on academic knowledge, the podcast is a more conversational, experience focused discussion around these issues. The second part of the chapter 'decolonising a Fool's Utopia' reflects on a joint collaboration between the podcasts 'Fool's Utopia' with 'Stripping the White Walls'. It highlights how an otherwise 'expert academic knowledge' based podcast 'decolonised' itself in its form and substance through a

conversation with 'Stripping the White Walls' where the focus was about experience as knowledge.

The Pedagogical Power of Podcasts

The rise of social media and online content-sharing platforms has resulted in the increasing presence of different types of digital media in pedagogical settings. However, the role of podcasts is arguably rarely accounted for in scholarly work that focuses on pedagogical approaches; including accounts of pedagogical positions which are aligned with social justice activist principles. The strategies of #DecoloniseUKC have been varied and attuned to the many challenges faced by staff and students who experience racism and intersecting forms of structural oppression during their time at university. 'Stripping the White Walls' is one of the different ways that #DecoloniseUKC have shared their work.

The range of topics covered in the podcast include modern-day slavery, solidarity-building, the history of decolonial work, imperialism, colonialism, and why those involved in #DecoloniseUKC are striving towards challenging institutional white supremacy and colonialist structures across academia. The podcast is not a peripheral part of #DecoloniseUKC activity, it is one of several significant ways that those involved in such work have turned to digital processes and social media to ensure that their message can be accessed and understood by many. The institutionally racist and colonialist foundations of universities must be challenged. Now!

From Twitter to podcasts, #DecoloniseUKC has sought out ways to create and engage with digital content that will communicate their collective efforts, such as their manifesto which emphasises the need for more co-production between students and academics, as well as underscoring the importance of understanding and addressing experiences of oppression at the intersections of ableism and racism. Unlike lengthy and onerous academic publishing processes that sometimes solely result in output being inaccessibly stored behind a paywall, the process of producing a podcast provides a sense of agency and accessibility regarding how the work of #DecoloniseUKC is framed and communicated by those at the centre of it. In addition, the creation of a podcast can aid abilities to document and share thoughts and experiences concerning contemporary forms of racism at university, in a timely and relatively immediate way which can bring attention to issues as they unfold.

Identifying the potential benefits and pedagogical power of podcasts does not undermine the value of written scholarship. Rather, recognising the pedagogical power of podcasts is important for many reasons, including their capacity to reach a broad audience beyond the conventional exclusionary academic contexts. Still, it is equally as vital to acknowledge that podcast formats are not inherently accessible, nor are they specifically associated with anti-racist and decolonial collective organising. In fact, the continued proliferation of far-right and white supremacist podcasts highlights that the power of podcasts is often harnessed by people with radically different ideological positions, including individuals whose views are the antithesis of those at the root of #DecoloniseUKC efforts. For this reason, when reflecting on the pedagogical power of podcasts there is a need to reckon with their scope to both uphold and challenge racist perspectives.

Put simply, depending on the content of podcasts, who is producing them, and their intentions, podcasts can contribute to anti-racist and decolonial pedagogical pursuits, such as the student-led work of #DecoloniseUKC. Alternatively, they can be conduits through which people perpetuate hate speech and even incite violence. Thus, podcasts can be a rich source of consciousness-raising related to the colonial and institutionally racist legacy of higher education institutions. As podcast culture is typically more associated with popular culture than academia, its scope to contribute to pedagogical change may be dismissed by those most invested in maintaining the elitist status quo in higher education. However, it is precisely the fact that the production processes and content of podcasts can considerably differ to traditional academic output which presents the possibility of podcasts contributing to critical and resistant pedagogical approaches.

Through their podcast series 'Stripping the White Walls', #DecoloniseUKC students have recorded and shared conversations which address issues related to white privilege and working towards the development of curriculum content that is not simply Eurocentric in nature. As well as the podcast featuring discussions with the potential to provide people with a critical educational experience, accompanying content on the #DecoloniseUKC website includes references to resources that provide a good entry point for people's self-education and consciousness-raising regarding how institutional racism and colonialism functions in the academy. Therefore, it may be through engaging with the 'Stripping the White Walls' podcast that people find themselves

further exploring and reflecting on literature and work which critiques the oppressive, racist and colonialist foundations of much of higher education.

Overall, the work of #DecoloniseUKC has involved the use of digital space and tools in ways that have raised awareness of related liberationist goals, in the words of those at the helm of such efforts. The podcast is but one of many examples of this and particularly demonstrates how the creation of digital media enable student-activists to bring attention to the challenges that they face and the reasons behind their collective-organising. Unfortunately, the digital visibility of such work can put individuals at risk. Targeted harassment, both online and offline, may result from increased visibility. Nevertheless, despite the dangers that can be involved in communicating #DecoloniseUKC activity through social media and podcasts, digital documentation and dissemination processes are crucial to critical interventions of those who intend to dismantle oppressive structures at the foundations of academia.

The production of podcasts such as 'Stripping the White Walls' can provide student-activists with the opportunity to foreground their perspectives and politics in a relatively autonomous way which does not require them to negotiate various potentially obstructive institutional gatekeepers. Moreover, by seeking out different creative channels through which to convey their message, #DecoloniseUKC have not simply spoken to or within their institution, they have reached out to many people and communities beyond it, and, ultimately, have refused to be confined by the walls of the academy.

Stripping the White Walls: The Podcast

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So, what does 'Stripping the White Walls' mean? My initial thoughts were to say 'knocking' instead of 'stripping' but as a collective, we didn't want to come across as being too radical. I thought to myself that this country is predominantly white and this isn't my 'home', so why don't we just strip some white walls instead?

The purpose of stripping the white walls is not to remove and marginalise white history, but to expose the other ethnicities that were present and contributed greatly to the development of the nation; to expose the number of other 'colours' that have been concealed by whiteness. We don't just exist on the door knobs or the frames, we also have our places on these walls. Unfortunately, due to the inferiority and ignorance of a large number of our white counterparts, they have felt the need to not only ignore us but to completely erase the fact that we contributed to what Britain is today.

The title of the podcast came from a recognition of the whiteness of my educational institution and higher education across the UK in general, where there is a lack of representation of people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Since we are a part of the decolonising movement across higher education, it made so much sense for me to suggest this title for our podcast.

Before I go on any further, it is important for me to say that I believe this movement begins with addressing the lack of representation, but does not end there.

There are many ways that this title could be interpreted. For example, the white walls represent the curriculum. Starting from primary school all the way up to University, all that I saw was white history and white individuals and when black history is brought up, it's almost always

about slavery, Martin Luther King, or Mary Seacole. The narrative of the 'white saviour' is constantly put forward. I believe this is as a result of colonisation. This may affect students that come from families without a contextual understanding of empire and colonisation (like myself) and teaching staff too. I often find that when European teachers are confronted by students that have this knowledge, they tend to feel threatened and become defensive.

The *White Walls* also represent the pedagogy and the staff (who are predominantly white, especially the further up the corporate ladder one looks). The ceilings that minority ethnic staff have to penetrate, unlike their white counterparts. This gives the illusion that in order to be successful or to be accepted that you have to attain whiteness. Fanons 'Black Skin White Masks' provides a brilliant example of this:

> When the black man comes into contact with the white world he goes through an experience of sensitization. His ego collapses. His self-esteem evaporates. He ceases to be a self-motivated person. The entire purpose of his behaviour is to emulate the white man, to become like him, and thus hope to be accepted as a man. (Sardar 2008, p. xiii)

Frantz Fanon, demonstrated how the colonised had unconsciously internalised their colonialism which may have resulted in a large amount of us individuals feeling somewhat inferior to our white counterparts and feeling that their behaviour was to be emulated in order to be successful.

Just like the colours of the LGBT flag are used to represent and reflect the diversity of the LGBT community the same effort should be applied when you see the kaleidoscope, when you see the manifesto and stripping white walls.

Stripping the White Walls also allows us to address and apply a critical race perspective[1] in analysing how whiteness works in the academy:

> The view that race, instead of being biologically grounded and natural, is socially constructed and that race, as a socially constructed concept, functions as a means to maintain the interests of the white population that constructed it.'[2]

The general idea behind our supporting podcast was to create an informal, unscripted and open space to share our thoughts and interview other academic activists who also have the desire to decolonise the curriculum and institution. The space was meant to be non-conforming and unhindered by curriculum or any kind of reading guide so the

conversations could be led in an organic way with guests. This podcast was hosted by Ahmed, along with fellow students. We decided to team up, not only to bring forth our different perspectives and experiences, but to celebrate the fact that our common denominators are what brings us together; the fact that we are all ethnic minorities in the academy and have noticed the marginalisation and lack of representation of ourselves in the academy.

Although we are still in the early stages of this podcast — having recorded six episodes so far, which have discussed topics such as white privilege, Keynes College and its association with empire. We have also had the privilege of interviewing Professor Gurminder Bhambra (the first Professor of postcolonial and decolonial studies in the UK). Meeting Professor Bhambra made me realise how much of a privilege it was to have been in the same room as her and how important it was to see academics from ethnic minority backgrounds (especially women) in these spaces addressing these issues, while also highlighting the fact that Black and Asian academics are not anomalies and that they are not given the attention and credit that is owed to them.

Decolonising a Fool's Utopia: Joint Episode With Stripping the White Walls

This particular section of the chapter is a reflection on the first recording of 'Stripping the White Walls' before its official launch. It was meant to be and was in fact, a deliberate collaboration between Stripping the White Walls and Fool's Utopia — a podcast on critical international law and international legal history.[3]

Fool's Utopia, is a podcast produced, hosted and planned entirely by Ahmed Memon and his colleagues at the Centre for Critical international Law and started in October 2018. The collaboration with Stripping the White Walls was meant to give support and facilitate the work of decolonising project at the University of Kent. The idea of the episode was for Stripping the White Walls to 'decolonise' a 'Fool's Utopia', in its form, substance and format.

Fool's Utopia is critical of traditional, European history and understanding of international law, critical of our focus in the way we explore the subject is through the importance of colonial history, continuing forms of imperialism, race and gender within the subject of international law.[4] Our format and conversations often questions who count as an

expert and the consequence of attributing legitimate knowledge only to certain people. We illuminate and interview critical legal scholars within the discipline. Nonetheless, our podcast remains a forum where the hierarchy of 'expertise' is maintained by centring voices that have 'academic' authority. The podcast Fool's Utopia, in its substance, was already involved with questions surrounding colonialism and imperialism in the making of international law. However, to do decolonial work is also to go beyond the substance and subvert a mode of producing knowledge in form as well. The format of the podcast Fool's Utopia was still bound by its colonial limitations — catering to and maintaining a hierarchy of knowledge producers — i.e. the academic 'experts.'

In order to decolonise a 'Fool's Utopia', it was important to think about what this meant in terms of the format, language and conversations in order to re-centre both the idea of what knowledge can look like, where it can come from and how it can be communicated. We realised that the biggest challenge of the podcast (a Fool's Utopia) has always been its inaccessibility to a broader audience beyond the academic sphere. This concern about inaccessibility is not just about language but also about politics of critical legal thinking. As Robert William Jr (1987) points out, critically approaching socio-legal issues is about politics which speaks to material realities of people and communities. Hence, 'rights' are more than just 'concepts' to be discussed by academics but real 'tangible experiences' of individuals and communities wrestling with inequalities. A podcast that centres decolonial work, itself, also, then needs to approached in a way where language is in fact inextricably linked to the politics of engagement with the people rather than about them or apart from them. This separation is at its root, colonial in nature, as it maintains a hierarchy of expertise coming from few privileged academics. Student centred podcasts, where the voices of the students emerge as knowledge producers, subvert this dynamic. This is even more relevant for a podcast that is based on racial injustice as students who deal with minoritisation and have experienced these issues need to be centred as knowledge producers.

In order to embody the spirit and purpose of the collaboration, it was important to speak to Joy, who was going to launch Stripping the White Walls, and has been part of the #DecoloniseUOK project. She introduced the project and outlined its relevance to the university environment and many concerns of students of colour. Having Joy in the podcast to talk about the objectives and work of the project, which has been rooted

in experiences of students of colour in the University of Kent, was a particularly important way in which the episode itself progressed and differentiated from all our other 'Fool's Utopia' episodes. The language of the podcast was conversational rather than heavy in theoretical vocabulary. At the same time, our conversations around student experiences, their reliance on a white/European curriculum and reflections on what decolonisation meant to us made for a rich discussion, without the need for 'experts' as the source of this knowledge. Through our conversation we relied more on experiential knowledge that informs our understanding of the world. Further, outlining how when we do come across authors that speak to our experiences, we process that knowledge. Through this approach the podcast served as a pedagogical forum where students of colour, as Dolores Delgado Bernal (2002) observes, were centred as the 'holders and creators of knowledge'. A great example of this experiential knowledge was developed through interactions with scholarship we came across. This reflects how Joy and I shared what decolonisation meant for us and how we came to 'break the door of our awareness' about it. I shared how my understanding of generational violence on the psychology of post-colonial people became clear to me through the reading of how the British East India Company and British Empire's administrators embedded ideas of English modernity as a higher standard that different cultures of the Indian subcontinent needed to reach. Modernity, then in the everyday imagination of the postcolonial was understood as Anglocentric linguistic and cultural practices such as fluency of English and eating habits. To this day these are still held as standards of civilisation within post-colonial states but also more importantly in the psyches of people in the post-colony. As Joy mentions in the podcast itself, seeing black lives matter movement in the US but also in the UK was her encounter with conversations around issues of race along with reading about colonial history and literature beyond slavery and Martin Luther King. For example, in our conversation she expands on this and refers to reading J.A. Rogers' *From Superman to Man* (2014), the biography of Malcom X (2015) and Adam Hochschild's King Leopold's Ghost (1999) as being the books that shaped her initial interest and curiosity about history beyond what was being taught in schools. Reflecting on this scholarship for the both of us was not just an intellectual exercise but a reflection or echo of our own lived experiences. As Joy mentions, her experience of studying law was often one where she was left feeling isolated because she did not have any contact with anyone who could relate to her especially since

the material she was studying did not make any allusions to race. What is key about engaging with course materials but also with the university experience is, as Joy mentions, empathy and not just sympathy. This was a sentiment that she said we could share but she knew her white peers or teaching staff would not. We shared, as I refer to it, a 'silent anger' in realising that we carried a sense of 'internalised inferiority' that has been passed down through generations. It is in the little ways of 'internalised inferiority' in our psyche we try to become 'better' and that better is always 'white European'. However, no matter how well we achieve those 'standards' — in our language, behaviour, 'education', we can never be or be accepted as good enough. This dissonance and 'internalised inferiority' is a generational trauma and violence that we come to face as we read, reflect on our experiences through learning. That learning, which can help us go through the process of 'breaking the door of our awareness' which inculcates a 'silent anger', 'pain' and yet gives us a new sense of consciousness. However, for the most part this is not given to us in university. As Joy says, it is only 'just, right, and responsible' that the university provides us with knowledge from other perspectives — not just white, European standards.

The podcast episode weaved in our personal stories as source of knowledge, in conversation with literature surrounding the history of decolonisation as it is told within the discipline of international law. As a podcast format and substance, it was conversational and reflection based where what we felt and experienced became a foundation of our reflection on anything academic. Looking back to the episode, what we were in effect doing was linking the personal, the local and the global, to say that decolonisation of the university is part of a much broader conversation. Within the bounds of this broader conversation 'decolonisation' is not just a moment — something that happened once upon a time — instead it refers to decolonisation as a 'doing'/ as a continuous struggle. As Joy points out, decolonisation is important because it reminds us that the struggle didn't stop and that words like 'diversify' do not pay attention to history and continuing struggles connected to our history. The word diversify, as Joy puts it, does not address the roots of the problem we face in the university specifically in relation to the BME attainment gap. Simply saying that 'diversifying the curriculum' is a solution ignores colonial history and its continuing legacy within our society which is reflected the experience of students of colour in universities.

Both Joy and Eric (podcast co-host) pointed out that even in a critical law school, whose hallmark is of deviating and questioning the norm, students of colour still feel a sense of alienation due to the content and environment in which they learn this content. I point out that the question then becomes who is this critical for and what is the focus of critical analysis. More often than not, critical legal thinking within the Law School when brought up 'provincialises critique developed by white/European scholars', in the same way as Dipesh Chakraborty has argued that understanding of history is provincialised to Europe (Chakraborty 2008). This is an important point we reflect on during this podcast when talking about post-colonial scholarship. Taking Hamid Dabashi's position on this, I point out that even when one speaks of decolonial scholars their conversations are often related to and centred around white/European philosophy instead of understanding scholars of the global south on their own terms and context (Dabashi 2015). Eric Leofledd, my colleague and co-host of the podcast Fool's Utopia, points out how this tendency to refer to and claim ownership of scholars like Fanon, stems from a need to re-centre conversations on European scholarship to 'redeem' themselves of their colonial past — i.e. it is a response of white guilt followed by white saviour complex.

Towards the end of the podcast episode and throughout we kept referring to the idea of 'stopping and listening, looking back and thinking' to focus on what has been going on throughout history and continues to happen. This episode was a deeply personal one, as it should have been, but also one where we — especially Joy and I — thought about what it meant for us to stop, listen and reflect. At the same time, when confronted with the question of where does the struggle lead to and if there is an end, Joy stated that 'decolonisation' will always be the continuous struggle. To see its end is to miss the point of it as the act of 'doing', rather than an end in and of itself. In writing this particular section of the chapter, I found myself reflecting once more and remembering that perhaps the ethic of decolonisation in all its modes must be in continuing to stop, listen, look back and think about our responsibility. In doing so, I realised that the podcast format as a pedagogical tool needs to be and has to be inherently decolonial in nature not just in its substance but also its format, language and reflections that can subvert power hierarchies around who produces and holds knowledge. Thus, even if, as Joy observes in her section within this volume on 'Stripping the White Walls', we are by no means experts. For me, this conversation was one that was far more valuable than 'expert'

knowledge. It was about experiential knowledge, empathy, community and reclaiming our voices through the podcast.

Notes

1 This was first used as an analytical framework to assess inequity in education.

2 Curry, T. (2019). Critical Race Theory, Social Sciences. [online] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/critical-race-theory.

3 'Fool's Utopia', https://soundcloud.com/user-919369831.

4 The podcast is influenced in its approach to international law and its history from Third World Approaches to International Law frameworks, see specifically Antony Anghie (2007).

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