“It’s the colonisation of the mind”:

How the legacy of the British Empire has impacted the University of Greenwich.

# Abstract

The aftermath of imperial Britain is entwined in every part of the UK. Colonial dominion brought on by European sovereignty resulted in slavery, the subjugation of the Global South and a demolishing of indigenous cultures. Widespread entrenched inequalities throughout societal domains are all forms of colonialism.

Repercussions of the British empire are prevalent in education and the fundamental imperialistic philosophies of colonialism have been internalised throughout universities. This research investigated the outcome of these legacies within UK universities, with a focus on the University of Greenwich. The university takes pride in its rich maritime history, however, there is no acknowledgement of the ‘less desirable’ side of this history. The historical iconography of the University of Greenwich is rooted in colonialism. Yet not enough light has been shed on this, and how it plays a role in perpetuating westernised imperialistic thought in academia. Collating the views of individuals who are a part of the University of Greenwich was paramount to the framework of this research. These sentiments provided insight into how the British empire continues to impact individuals within the university. It also provided valuable suggestions for what academics, the university and students can do to confront the colonial links.

# Introduction

British imperial supremacy and industrial capitalism were inseparable from slavery (Scanlan, 2020). There is a dangerous tendency to view the British empire through rose-tinted glasses and ignore the fact colonialism continues to be a determining force of pedagogy. The UK state is institutionally racist therefore, any institute within this state (i.e., universities) will also be a product of British imperialism (White, 2023; Bhattacharyya et al, 2021; Is Uni Racist?, 2021, 00:30:34-00:30:53; Mohdin, 2021; Wong, 2022; Sian, 2017; Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2021). This means without making the demolishing of colonial governance the centre of decolonising discussions, the underlying causes of racism are being ignored.

# Legacies of Colonialism

The nineteenth century was coined as “Britain's imperial century” (Lloyd, 2007, p 2). The British empire was the largest in world history; at its peak covering 25% of the world and governing one-fifth of the global population (Jasanoff, 2020; The National Archives, 2021; Lloyd, 2007). The Trans-Atlantic slave trade was the largest forced migration of people in world history (Carpi and Owusu, 2022; College of Charleston, n.d; Santalone, 2013; Morgan, 2018). This period of carnage was continual for almost five hundred years, and when slave trade trafficking had reached its peak, Britain had become one of the largest carriers of enslaved Africans (Ferguson, 2012; Halperin and Palan, 2015; McCreery, 2016; College of Charleston, n.d.).

In total, Britain transported approximately 3.1 million enslaved Africans (Eltis, 2001). However, due to the dehumanising conditions on slave ships, it's estimated only 2.7 million arrived at their destinations (Eltis, 2001). Olaudah Equiano wrote an autobiography about his experience of being a slave. He described the Middle Passage and detailed how “a variety of loathsome smells…brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died” and “the shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable” (Equiano, 1999, p, 51-54). Identities were purloined, lands were invaded, languages, cosmologies and philosophies were debarred. Cultures, environments and ecological customs were devastated, and the totality of the global ontology became slavery (Conklin, 1998). The British Empire caused the traditional understandings and practices of indigenous countries to be lost. Eventually indoctrinating the world with imperialistic philosophies, resulting in the ‘colonisation of the mind’.

Pakenham describes how the continent of Africa was “sliced up like a cake” by the end of 1900 (2015, p, 2). Colonialism resulted in 90% of the African continent being under the domination of Europe, with 27% being colonised by Britain alone, making it the principal power of the continent (Mackenzie, 2005; Penrose, 2012). India was an indispensable part of the empire and was held in a “privileged position” by Britain (Lloyd, 2007, p 2). Through annexation, Britain acquired 66% of the subcontinent, securing India’s borders and bounding them with treaties (Lloyd, 2007). The corporation involved in the development of this trade was the East India Company. The company depended on the trafficking of slaves to provide labour and was a prominent force in British imperialism- established to initiate connections in South Asia (Platt, 1969; Laidlaw, 2012; Carson, 2012; Major, 2012).

## Decolonisation and universities

Decolonisation of the curriculum in higher education is a process of change, that sets out to interrogate Eurocentric and racist narratives “surrounding the production of academic ‘knowledge’”(Zwiener-Collins et al, 2021, p 1). Universities often do this by diversifying curriculums across subjects, integrating more academics from racialised minority backgrounds and encouraging the teaching of scholarship that is traditionally marginalised (Zwiener-Collins et al, 2021). However, it is important to note this is arguably the incorrect use of the term decolonisation (Dhillon, 2021; Adebisi, 2020; Tuck and Yang, 2012; Taylor, 2023; Hundle, 2019). Decoloniality is more than reforming curricula, it is about dismantling and disrupting as well as reimagination and transforming (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). Many radical scholars and anticolonial theorists had engaged in decolonial practices and conversations decades before it became a mainstream discussion (Loyola-Hernández and Gosal, 2022). The book, ‘The Wretched of the Earth’, is a multidisciplinary analysis of the effect of colonialism on racial consciousness authored by Fanon. In it, he states “decolonisation…sets out to change the order of the world” and speaks on decolonisation emanating from the struggles of racialised, marginalised communities (Fanon, 1961, p 2). Decolonisation confronts the inherently colonial, capitalist structures that are universities, thus diversifying the curriculum is not enough to be coined as decolonisation.

Many UK universities have boarded the ‘decolonial bandwagon’ without fully understanding the true meaning of decolonisation (Moosavi, 2020). Universities are seemingly emphasising diversifying western curricula, but ignoring that the material realities in which colonial institutions were founded continue to thrive (Loyola-Hernández and Gosal, 2022; Dhillon, 2021; Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997; McArthur, 2013). The verbification of decolonisation means it has been “added to all manner of business as usual university processes”, therefore making it just another business aim of universities (Dhillon, 2021, p 252). The focus has shifted from confronting premies of empire to the supposed progressive optics of having a diverse university. Changing who sits at the table, but not changing the table itself will not deconstruct racism within academia. Having a more diverse cohort/staff network, whilst academia itself continues to centre white supremacy, will not provide safe spaces for racialised minorities (McArthur, 2013). Arguably, to truly challenge these violent narratives, a more holistic approach is necessary. Universities need to be intentional about examining their praxis, in addition to challenging forms of power and hegemony. Change is needed *throughout* UK higher academic institutions to disrupt the neoliberal colonial ontology that is the status quo (Andrews, 2018; Andrews, 2011).

Following the 2020 murder of George Floyd, many UK universities released race pledges and statements calling for the ‘decolonising’ of their universities. Even still, we continue to see racial discrimination within the UK university system. 64% of students reported witnessing acts of racism from students or staff, and 56% of students reported experiencing racist name-calling and insults (Unite Students, 2022). The inequality can be seen in student grades too. The ethnicity awarding gap refers to the difference between white UK-domiciled students being awarded a first or upper-second class, and ethnic minority UK-domiciled students receiving the same degree. The awarding gap can be calculated using the Value Added (VA) dashboard. This works by using the admission qualifications of a student and their degree to determine a sector-wide expectation (Greenwich Students’ Union, n.d.). In UK universities, the awarding gap between white and Black students is 18.6%. With 85.7% of white students receiving a first or upper second class, compared to 67.1% of Black students (HESA, 2022; GOV.UK, 2022). Only 20% of Black students received a first class, the lowest percentage out of all the racialised minority groups (HESA, 2022; GOV.UK, 2022). In the Liberal Arts and Sciences faculty at the UoG, white students have a VA score of 1.11 and for racialised minority students the score is 0.87 (Greenwich Students’ Union, n.d.). This means there is an awarding gap of 0.27 making it the largest within the university.

Universities are painted as utopian spaces for academics however, for non-white academics, academia is a space where the paradigms of colonialism are rife (Arday and Mirza, 2018). 7 in 10 staff have reported facing forms of microaggressive acts within the university, at least monthly (UUK, 2020). Microaggressions are a form of crypto-racism which are often disregarded as they are not explicitly overt; nevertheless, they are still detrimental forms of racism (Pierce, 1969). Césaire described colonialism as “a poison” being “installed in the veins of Europe” and this ‘poison’ is unquestionably felt by racialised people in universities today. (2001, p, 164). Colonialism has produced a long history of trauma that means racialised minorities will continue to be victims of racism, prejudice and stereotyping (Allen, 2015). As a result higher educational institutions need to be proactive in confronting their histories, to truly create an inclusive environment for staff and students (Arday and Mirza, 2018; Bhambra et al, 2018). This too includes the University of Greenwich.

## Colonialism and The University of Greenwich

Many British investors capitalised on the East India Company, one being architect Sir Christopher Wren who designed the Old Royal Naval College (Mortensen,1997). The UoG uses historic maritime architecture as one of its selling points to define the university. The university’s website states:

“The beautiful baroque buildings on campus were designed for the Royal Navy at the end of the 17th century by Sir Christopher Wren” (University of Greenwich, n.d)

However, there is no acknowledgement of imperial history. Wren was an avid stockholder and played “an active role in the operation of the [East India] company” (Mortensen, 1997, p.76). The lack of acknowledgement of this colonial history is problematic. Avoiding the ‘undesirable’ symbolism of the campus means imperial ideologies will continue to hold their place within society. These ideologies result in racism within universities becoming so normalised that “its manifestations go unnoticed” (Brantlinger, 1985, p, 293; Hartin, 2015).

Another one of the UoG’s ‘landmarks’ is the Queen Anne court. Queen Anne secured a 30 yearlong contract from the Spanish Crown, sustaining the royal practice of endorsing slavery (Paul, 2010). The *Asiento de negros* meant Britain would supply African slaves to Spanish plantations in America. (Weindl, 2008; Anes, 2002). Queen Anne passed this contract to the South Sea Company, where she held 22.5% of stock, in the hopes of restructuring the country’s national debt (Paul, 2010; Bruce, 1734; Sherwood, 2021).

The UoG has student accommodation halls named after Daniel Defoe; an English trader, pamphleteer and stockholder in the South Sea Company (Royal Museums Greenwich, 2022; Odlyzko, 2018; Backscheider, 1992; Novak, 2003; Richetti, 2015; Jabbar, 2014; Furbank and Owens, 2001). Defoe himself often defended slavery due to the fact it powered the increasing wealth of Britain (Kaplan, 1970; Defoe, 1711). He stated in his work:

“Trade of such Places as we shall Seize and Plant, will, by Degrees . . . open such a Vein of Riches, will return such Wealth, as, in few Years, will make us more than sufficient Amends for the vast Expences” (Defoe, 1711, p, 19).

Despite the fact he was aware of the barbarity of slavery, his mercantilist beliefs meant he placed the inhumanness of the slave trade second to capitalistic needs (Kaplan, 1970). He “defended monopolistic rights of the Royal African Company” and did not challenge the suppositions that his novel *Robinson Crusoe* ignited (Boyle, 2019; Kaplan, 1970, p, 7).

Lastly, the King William court at the university is named after King William III (also referred to as William of Orange). He is remembered and celebrated for his win at the Battle of Boyne, however as with many British monarchs, there was a more heinous side to his rule (Lenihan, 2011; National Army Museum, 2012). Edward Colston, whose statue in 2020 was torn down by protestors in Bristol, was an English merchant who played a leading role in the Atlantic slave trade (Nasar, 2020; Morgan, 1999). Colston was the Deputy Governor of the Royal Africa Company (RAC), “the most prominent purveyor of enslaved people in British history (Nasar, 2020, p, 1219). King William bought Colston’s shares in the RAC and also showed ample support for the East India Company, issuing several charters to the company (Pettigrew and Van Cleve, 2014; Ball, 2017; Leask, 2020).

The UoG’s strategy for 2030 includes focusing on inclusivity, and culture and fostering an environment for staff and students to feel accepted without fear (University of Greenwich, 2021). They also state:

“Equality, diversity and inclusion to be embedded throughout all [the universities] structures, processes and behaviours” (University of Greenwich, 2021, p, 30)

There is a gap between theory and practice in this case. Colonialism led to some of the largest violent dispossessions of indigenous populations across the entire world. Having part of the University named after a royal imperialist who was a dedicated supporter of the slave trade, arguably does not provide a safe and inclusive environment. Equality, diversity and inclusion cannot exist within an institution that fails to acknowledge its perpetuation of white supremacy. Statues, buildings and street names “are rarely relics from the historical period they represent”; they have been decided upon years after (Knudsen and Anderson, 2019, p, 253). Consequently, this means during the naming process colonial links have completely been disregarded. When a building is named after an individual, it is generally assumed the person was a positive influence, but this is not the case with the UoG. Instead of diversity being embedded in the university’s structures, the imperial legacies of the British Empire are being entrenched and upheld.

The UoG would not exist in its current form as one of the country’s most opulent and decadent higher educational establishments, without being indirectly financed by slavery. The historical iconography of the UoG is rooted in colonialism. Nevertheless, there is currently no previous research exploring coloniality within the UoG, and this is what this project aims to change. Through qualitative research and semi-structured interviews, the sentiments of two students and two staff members of the university were collected. With the aim of hearing their opinions of colonialism, the UoG and decolonisation.

## Methodology

Qualitative researchers aim to understand each individual’s view of the world, phenomena or significant topics (Jones, 1995). Traditionally, social sciences use qualitative methods to uncover the nature of a person’s experience and investigate what lies behind phenomena (Cypress, 2015; Speziale et al, 2011). Qualitative methods are beneficial in developing original conceptual frameworks or hypotheses (Sofaer, 1999). For this research project, a deeper understanding of opinions on the British Empire and its links with Greenwich was paramount. There is human subjectivity and a “contextual world of interpretations” within the topic of colonialism; and to ascertain the most colourful opinions, a qualitative process was needed (Cypress, 2015, p, 357).

Social justice is a political concept that is focused on egalitarianism within numerous societal scopes (Reisch, 2002; Craig et al, 2008; Miller, 2001). Carrying out research should be a social justice project, and social justice can be made a public agenda within qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Cypress, 2015, Morse, 2016). Qualitative research can contribute to social justice in several ways; by identifying points that need to be addressed or improved and suggesting alternative solutions to matters that have been identified (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Cypress, 2015). This research aims to investigate the links between the British Empire and universities, and the consequences of those relations. For this reason, qualitative research would be the most appropriate for this project.

The interviews were between 25-45 minutes long and conducted over Microsoft Teams due to COVID-19 restrictions. 13-15 questions were asked and there were also probing questions. The questions focused on the colonial history of the UoG, how it impacts staff and students, and what the university can do to confront this past (see appendix 1). To recruit participants, an email was sent and included a participant information sheet.

In total four participants were chosen to be interviewed for this research. A GSU Officer, two lecturers and a student. Pseudonyms were provided for anonymity. Full ethical approval was granted by the FLAS ethic board.

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| **Name** | **Position at the University of Greenwich** | **Gender** | **Ethnicity** |
| Isabel | GSU Officer | Female | \*Withheld\* |
| Elijah | Lecturer | Male | White passing |
| Bethany | Student | Female | Black |
| Athena | Lecturer | Female | White |

The chosen analysis method for this project was thematic analysis. “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p 79). Thematic analysis can be seen to coincide with the interpretive paradigm because as stated by Boyatzis, it allows the “social construction of meaning to be articulated” (1998, p 12). To carry out this analysis, all four interviews had to be transcribed, read through multiple times and immediate thoughts written down after each interview (Vaismoradi et al, 2013; Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes were all relevant to the topic of colonial empire, and this allowed me to delve into the topic further to successfully answer my research question

Using reflexivity, it can be established how one’s backgrounds play a part in how research is interpreted and conducted (Swaminathan and Mulvihill, 2018). Acknowledging how situations have informed research is needed and this can be done through confessional tales (Van Maanen, 1998). As a Black woman, my positionality has shaped my research interests. As someone who lives in the second most impoverished borough in London, I have always had an interest in researching the history of marginalisation and discrimination. I have felt that Britain teaches racialised minorities to be ashamed of their heritage, and the spheres of knowledge we learn from are skewed towards Eurocentrism. For example, when African history was taught in school, ‘underdeveloped’ and ‘inferior’ were the descriptions used. Studying criminology has allowed me to realise that ‘third world’ countries were never meant to comply with Eurocentric norms, and the education system has masked the true extent of slavery and the exploitation of Africa. These personal experiences have been transformed into accountable data by showcasing the procedures and steps taken during this research (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Ultimately bias is inevitable however, within this research, I am not claiming to represent all experiences and sentiments. The purpose is to provide insight into the opinions and understandings of some UoG staff and students; in the hope of opening up the conversation surrounding colonial legacies.

# Results

## “not all white people, not all white people”: White fragility and the university

In line with DiAngelo’s (2018) arguments about white fragility, participants noted that the UoG and academics showcased reluctance when addressing race. ‘White fragility’ describes the discomfort and defensiveness that white people elicit when confronted about or discussing racial matters (DiAngelo, 2018). In the first interview, the participant stressed that certain staff tend to show discomfort when notions of race are discussed:

*“Sometimes I’ve heard White academics or staff produce that very defensive position of like fragility. So, I’ve been in sessions based on decolonising the university and White academics have interrupted to say, “not all White people, not all White people”-* Athena

Responses such as these sustain white racial equipoise and especially in universities, perpetuate institutionalised whiteness. The fact this mentality is arising from white academics, who hold the most power and privilege within universities, is gravely concerning and is something the UoG must address.

In 2015, MP David Lammy was quoted stating UK universities are “doing no better” than other establishments in British society, and are in fact “doing worse” in terms of racial equality (Alexander and Arday, 2015, p, 3). This sentiment is echoed by participants in the interviews, and it seems that the egalitarian ideas linked with equality are not being comfortably approached by academics. The University has recently released a Race Action Plan (RAP) (University of Greenwich, 2022). One key highlight is the university aims to close the awarding gap between white and racialised minority students (University of Greenwich, 2022). The action plan:

“calls for a cultural and behavioural change within the university environment, ensuring that our university is a welcoming and inclusive place where everyone, including our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff and students can work, study and achieve their full potential” (University of Greenwich, 2022).

However, Greenwich needs to acknowledge this is impossible if staff and academics continue to hold a position of white fragility. You cannot ensure inclusivity for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff or students when white reluctance is fuelling the maintenance of white supremacy within the university. The UoG’s race pledges call for cultural and behavioural changes to eliminate racism in the university. However, they all fail to address the fact academic institutions are inherently violent towards racialised minorities because they are institutes upholding a state built upon white supremacy. Furthermore, systemic racism has historical roots and for it to be dismantled the systems in place must be uprooted. If the RAP is to “eliminate structural, institutional and systemic racism”, it must recognise the construction of race stems from both slavery and colonialism and is pervaded through imperialism and capitalism (University of Greenwich, 2022, p, 8).

## “Built on our ancestor's demise”: The University of Greenwich’s Buildings

The home campus of the UoG epitomises maritime history. The university takes pride in its rich seafaring past: the Old Royal Naval College buildings, the English Baroque style architecture and the Cutty Sark. In addition to the imperialistic architecture of the university, the names of several buildings also have ties with colonial empire. The people the university’s buildings are named after are deeply rooted in slavery. One individual stated how they felt about this:

*“Disgusted but at the same time, I feel privileged, because as much as all of that was built on our ancestor’s demise in a sense. If only they could see how diverse our campus is today...\*cries\* where you have Black brothers and sisters studying in Greenwich. Something that probably a lot of them wouldn’t have even dreamt of because they weren’t allowed to dream that far”-* Bethany.

Unmistakeably, it can be hard to hear that the university you attend indirectly benefits from Britain’s violent history. Hence, the building's names must be contextualised and historically comprehended to ensure transparency. In recent times, certain UK universities have begun changing their building names to challenge the glorification of imperialism. Some universities that have done this are City University of London, University College London, the University of Cambridge and the University of Bristol (UCL, 2020; ITV News, 2020; Neate, 2020, Independent, 2022). One participant interviewed shared their concern over the UoG naming policy:

*“we’re building new buildings and what’s the naming practice? I’m really concerned that you know, it’s still rich benefactors that are getting buildings named after them”-* Elijah.

The renaming of buildings has come under criticism due to some claiming it encourages ‘cultural policing’ which drives the censoring of British culture (Bhambra et al, 2018; Jasanoff, 2020; Morris et al, 2020). However this is incorrect for multiple reasons, the first being much of British ‘culture’ has derived from other countries. Almost all of ‘Britain’s’ rich history of innovation, arts and architecture was stolen from the countries it colonised; Britain’s ‘culture’ has always been moulded by the imperial experience (Stockwell, 2008). The second reason; believing renaming buildings removes British culture, means there is a lack of ability to comprehend culture outside of Eurocentrism. The honouring of these figures, whose status and privilege rested on the systematic exploitation of racialised people, is harmful and further promotes the normalised societal racism prevalent today. Finally, building names are not history, they are memorialisations. The history of these figures will ultimately never be erased; their actions have caused the continued intergenerational destruction of racialised minorities. However, we can begin to eliminate the glorification of colonial figureheads through renaming processes.

## “Everything is about empire really”

Ultimately, regardless of how many legislations are put in place to tackle racism, and how many plans and acts are introduced; this will not change the view of “enslaved people from quasi-animal to human” overnight (Eddo-Lodge, 2017, p, 6). For racialised minorities to succeed in an environment that is set up for them to fail is challenging. An example of this topic was stated in the fourth interview:

*“I mean in a sense I would say everything is about empire, really… [the UoG] need to look at the underlying systemic and structural issues”-* Elijah.

Inequalities persist for higher education academic staff from racialised minorities, and there is an underrepresentation of racialised minority staff at senior levels (Arday, 2018). Data shows 89.1% of academic professors are white and only 0.7% are Black, the lowest percentage of racialised minority professors (Advance HE, 2021). And out of all the 22,000 professors in the UK, only 41 are Black women. Data produced by HESA (2018) also showed out of the 535 university staff employed as “managers, directors or senior officials”, none were Black (Adams, 2017).

The 2021 Equality and Diversity report, states “EDI is at the heart of everything we do at Greenwich” (University of Greenwich, 2021). However, looking at the first five individuals named on the UoG ‘senior staff’ webpage, all are white (University of Greenwich, 2022). On the ‘Pro Vice-Chancellors’ page, again all four are white (University of Greenwich, 2022). This is not reflective of “the values embodying social and cultural pluralism and equity” (Arday, 2018, p, 192; Adams, 2017; Aguirre and Martinez, 2006; Chun and Evans, 2009; Williams, 2013). How can change be expected to be seen and felt, when the majority of senior staff who hold power within institutions have no lived experiences of racial marginalisation?

# Discussion

This discussion differs from traditional ones, instead, it discusses the recommendations given by participants to the UoG. During the interview, each individual was asked what the UoG can do to confront their colonial histories. These specific suggestions are elaborated on within this section. The first suggestion involved providing information to students and others about the British Empire and the university:

*“There could also be workshops where we have passionate advocates willing to teach about the topic of colonialism”-* Bethany.

Bethany felt strongly about educating people and looking past the polished history of Greenwich that is usually advertised. The criminology department at the university runs many workshops and talks. The department does an amazing job of bringing awareness to and educating others about important societal topics. Based on what was suggested by Bethany, the colonial history of the university is something the faculty could also look at hosting a talk on. To educate everyone about who the university buildings are named after, an interactive trail could be created. Using QR codes placed outside notable buildings, e.g. Queen Anne Court, individuals can read and listen to the colonial links of these figures. An example of this is Vice’s ‘Unfiltered History Tour’; visitors to the British Museum can scan objects and listen to the true history of certain artefacts, told by people from their homelands (Vice, 2021; Faloyin, 2021).

Accessibility of data was another recommendation that was mentioned during the interviews:

*“let’s have a chat about it in our class, like without needing to go and request data. We can just go and look online and be like oh, let’s talk about this”-* Isabel.

When looking into historical figures and their connections with slavery, it was extremely difficult to find articles and research on them. There is an opportunity here for the university to research imperial history, how they indirectly benefit from it and make it easily accessible for all. One example of this is the Legacies of British Slavery Database, launched by University College London; to showcase the legacies of slavery in Britain (UCL, 2012; UCL, 2019).

As well as recommendations to the university, one participant suggested that lecturers also need to work on themselves to tackle larger issues:

*“I really think lecturers need to humble themselves to acknowledge they don’t know everything and be OK with that. Learn about the colonial histories and ideologies that have framed their disciplines so that they can be comfortable teaching that. Because, if you’re scared of talking about race there’s a problem”-* Athena.

Everyone is a product of a colonial society and this means we have internalised an imperialistic way of thought. Lecturers are not excluded from this, therefore they too must challenge their biases and beliefs. White lecturers must recognise and accept their privileges, the fact they have power, and access to things people from racialised minorities do not have. They must be actively anti-racist and work on a “radical reorientation of [their] consciousness” (Kendi, 2023).

Finally, the onus was put on specifically the UoG to pay reparations:

*“I think that there should be an obligation on the university to provide bursaries and grants and scholarships for disadvantaged students, and to do outreach work into local schools…the university aren’t taking it as seriously as they could”* – Elijah.

There are currently no scholarships offered by the university that are directly aimed at Black students. This is despite the fact universities are inherently elitist colonial institutions- and these students are affected the most by this. Stemming back to its beginnings, formal education systems have been designed to polarise people and create an ‘elite’. Although universities are now more accessible to a wider group of people, colonial structures mean racialised minorities are still disadvantaged. With maintenance loans being unable to cover the skyrocketing living and accommodation costs in the UK and student debt increasing, racialised minority students are being hit hardest. Therefore, the university should consider providing scholarships and bursaries to these groups of students. Elijah also touched upon the fact the university should organise outreach work in local schools, and this is something that is needed. Universities are overflowing with a plenitude of knowledge, and opportunities to learn and connect with others. However, due to the fact they have been monetised by the government, a lot of valuable education is not accessible to those who cannot enter university. Carrying out non-recruitment outreach work with local schools, specifically targeting disadvantaged students, means they will also be equipped with the same knowledge. Dismantling the prestigious hierarchical gate that the university is guarded by. Finally, the university may consider following the path of the University of Glasgow by making concrete reparative measures and paying back those impacted most by slavery (Samson, 2020). The UoG must invest in research concerning their history; they should conversate with students and staff to gain insight into their lived experiences. To build a larger picture of how people at the UoG feel about these conversations, and what solutions they propose. The UoG should have an interest in funding research such as this to achieve its goals by 2030- as highlighted in its strategy (University of Greenwich, 2021).

# Conclusion

The reason this project was carried out was to investigate the legacies the British Empire has had on UK universities and the UoG. It also set out to remove the stigma surrounding openly having discourses about colonialism. Through the interviews carried out and further research done, it is clear colonial legacies are still present in universities. After the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd, performative activism has been rife. The paradoxical ‘decolonial’ agenda universities have claimed to be working under has, instead of implanting anti-imperialist values, implanted further whiteness. Universities including Greenwich, have become preoccupied with diversification but representation does not go far enough. The university needs to tease out the systems of exploitation that affect those of marginalised races, groups and lower socio-economic backgrounds. The UoG's commitment to anti-racism is not defined within their RAP or 2030 strategy; it is defined in who makes up their senior staff, who receives the highest grades, who receive the most pay. That is what shows commitment.

It is hoped this dissertation has highlighted this for the university. It can be predicted that more universities will begin to look at their systemic racism- but it is important to root out these issues from their historical foundations, by demolishing imperial systems. This project has emphasised the importance for the UoG and other universities to push for the interrogation of how these racist structures have manifested, to see substantive and tangible changes.

## Appendix 1: Interview Guide

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# ***Next steps*** ***Probing questions***

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# 1. How are you today?

# 2. How are you finding studying Criminology? Or how did you get into teaching Criminology? Or how did you get into being a GSU officer?

# 3. Why did you choose to study Criminology?

# 4. What made you choose to study at the University of Greenwich?

# 5. Tell me what you know about the history of the campus if anything

# ***a.*** ***Explain campus history***

# ***b.*** ***Explain the links***

# 6. How do you feel about the history surrounding the university?

# 7. What do you know about who the accommodation and areas of the university are named after

# **a.** ***Explain Queen Anne court etc***

# **b.** ***How do you feel about the areas of the university being named after people who played a role in slavery/ establishing the British empire?***

# 8. Do you feel Universities need to confront the links they have with colonialism?

# ***a.*** ***How about Greenwich? Do you feel THE UNIVERSITY MUST ACKNOWLEDGE the links it has with slavery?***

# 9. Do you know what the term ‘decolonise’ means?

# ***a.*** ***Explain the term meaning (however each person may have their own definition of decolonise)***

# 10. Could you tell me if you feel there is a gap between theory and practice of decolonising institutions

# ***a.*** ***What can be done to bridge this gap?***

# 11. How do you feel about Greenwich’s position around decolonisation?

# 12. How do you feel the British empire has affected the curriculum in universities?

# ***a.*** ***How about in the subject you study/teach specifically?***

# 13. Do you feel the University needs to be more open about its colonial links?

# 14. Do you feel decolonising the university is realistic?

# ***a.*** ***How can it be achieved?***

# ***b.*** ***What can students do?***

# ***c.*** ***What can teachers do?***

# ***d.*** ***What can the university do?***

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