

“It’s the colonisation of the mind”: how the legacy of the British Empire has affected the University of Greenwich.

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Abstract

The aftermath of imperial Britain is entwined with every part of the United Kingdom (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. This university takes pride in its rich maritime history, but acknowledgement of the ‘less desirable’ side of this past is lacking. The historical iconography of the University of Greenwich is rooted in colonialism, yet not enough light has been shed on this, nor on how it plays a role in perpetuating westernised imperialistic thought in academia. This research used semi-structured interviews with academic staff and students at the University of Greenwich to explore this topic. Thematic analysis revealed insights into how the British Empire continues to affect individuals within the university. It also provided valuable suggestions that include what the university, staff and students can do to confront 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 that colonialism continues to be a determining force of pedagogy. The United Kingdom (UK) state is institutionally racist and any institution – such as universities – within this state will therefore also be a product of British imperialism (White, 2023; Bhattacharyya *et al.*, 2021; Mohdin, 2021; Wong, 2022; Sian, 2017; Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2021, Adey, 2021). This means that, unless the demolishing of colonial governance is at 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 a quarter of the world and governing one fifth of the global population (Jasanoff, 2020; The National Archives, 2021; Lloyd, 2007). The transatlantic slave trade was the largest forced migration of people in world history (Carpi and Owusu, 2022; College of Charleston, n.d; Santalone, 2013; Morgan, 2017). This period of carnage continued for almost five hundred years and, when slave trade trafficking had reached its peak, Britain had become one of the largest carriers of enslaved African people (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, owing to the dehumanising conditions on slave ships, it is estimated that only 2.7 million arrived at their destinations (Eltis, 2001), meaning that 400,000 were murdered en route. 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, 2021, pp.51-54). Identities were purloined, lands were invaded and languages, cosmologies and philosophies were debarred. Cultures, environments and ecological customs were devastated as slavery became widespread.

Pakenham describes how the continent of Africa was “*sliced up like a cake*” by the end of 1900 (1992, 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, 1983; Penrose, 2014). India was also 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; it 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

The British Empire caused the traditional understandings and practices of indigenous countries to be lost, indoctrinating the world with imperialistic philosophies and so causing the ‘colonisation of the mind’.

Decolonisation of the curriculum in higher education (HE) 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, by including more academics from racialised minority backgrounds and by encouraging the teaching of scholarship that has traditionally been marginalised (Zwiener-Collins *et al.*, 2021). However, it is important to note that 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 a complex historical framework that involves dismantling and disrupting, as well as reimagining and transforming (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018).

Many radical scholars and anticolonial theorists from the Global South have engaged in decolonial practices and conversations decades before it became a Northcentric discussion (Loyola-Hernández and Gosal, 2022; Moosavi, 2020). Fanon's (1961) book, entitled '***The Wretched of the Earth***', provides a multidisciplinary analysis of the effect of colonialism on racial consciousness. Fanon states "*decolonisation...sets out to change the order of the world*" and refers to decolonisation as emanating from the struggles of racially marginalised communities (Fanon, 2001, p.2). Although this is an older text, Fanon's ideologies continue to be useful in today's climate when thinking about decolonial methods. Since decolonisation confronts the inherently colonial, capitalist structures that are universities, diversifying the curriculum is not sufficient to merit being termed decolonisation. Some academics further argue that, within the imperial core, decolonisation cannot happen (Bhambra, 2007). And because UK universities are neoliberal melting pots of "*ethnocentrism, elitism, exclusion*"; cutting out the cancer of coloniality is impossible (Moosavi, 2020, p.342; Bhambra *et al.*, 2018; Mignolo, 2014; Connell, 2007a; Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury, 2018; Andrews, 2018).

Many UK universities have boarded the decolonial bandwagon without fully understanding the true meaning of decolonisation (Moosavi, 2020). They emphasise diversifying western curricula but ignore the fact that the material realities in which colonial institutions were founded continue to thrive (Loyola-Hernández and Gosal, 2022; Dhillon, 2021; Adorno and Horkheimer, 2016; 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 is on the optics of having a diverse cohort, staff network and curriculum however, this is not truly confronting the premise of empire. If white supremacy continues to govern academia, the global majority will continue to feel unsafe (McArthur, 2013). 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 made pledges and statements calling for the 'decolonising' of their universities. In spite of that, we continue to see racial discrimination within the UK university system. In a study conducted by Unite Students, 64% of students reported witnessing acts of racism from students or staff and 56% of students reported experiencing racist name-calling and insults (2022). Inequalities can be seen in student grades too. At the University of Greenwich (UoG), the awarding gap can be calculated using the university's value-added (VA) dashboard. This works by using the

admission qualifications of individual students and their degree to determine a sector-wide expectation (Greenwich Students' Union, 2020). In the Liberal Arts and Sciences faculty at the UoG, White students have a VA score of 1.11, while for racialised minority students the score is 0.87 (Greenwich Students' Union, 2020). This means there is an awarding gap of 0.27 making it the largest within the university. In other UK universities, the average awarding gap between White and Black students is 18.6%. That is, 85.7% of White students receiving a first or upper-second class, compared to 67.1% of Black students (HESA, 2022; GOV.UK, 2022). For the 21/22 academic year, only 20% of Black students received a first class, the lowest percentage out of all the ethnic minority groups (HESA, 2022; GOV.UK, 2022).

Césaire described colonialism as “*a poison*” being “*installed in the veins of Europe*” and this poison is unquestionably felt by the Global Majority in universities today (2001, p.164). For non-White academics, academia can be a space where the remnants of colonialism remain rife (Arday and Mirza, 2018). Recent data suggests that seven out of ten staff have reported facing forms of micro-aggressive acts within the university, on at least a monthly basis (UUK, 2020).

Colonialism has produced a long history of trauma that means People of the Global Majority will continue to be victims of racism, prejudice and stereotyping (Allen, 2015). That said, the UoG needs to be proactive in confronting its histories, to create a truly inclusive environment for staff and students (Arday and Mirza, 2018; Bhabra *et al.*, 2018).

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 promotes historic maritime architecture as one of its unique selling points:

“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)

The problem is that there is no acknowledgement of the beautiful baroque buildings' imperialist history; or of the fact that Wren was an avid stockholder and played “*an active role in the operation of the [East India] company*” (Mortensen, 1997, p.76). The overlooking of this colonial history is problematic. Avoiding the ‘undesirable’ symbolism of the campus means that imperial ideologies will continue to hold their place within the university and society at large. 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 year long contract from the Spanish Crown, sustaining the royal practice of endorsing slavery (Paul, 2010). The *Asiento de negros* meant that Britain would supply African slaves to Spanish

plantations in America (Weindl, 2008; Anes, 2002). Queen Anne passed this contract to the South Sea Company (of which 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, 1989; Novak, 2003; Richetti, 2015; Jabbar, 2014; Furbank and Owens, 2001). Defoe himself often defended slavery because 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).

Defoe was aware of the barbarity of slavery; nonetheless, his mercantilist beliefs meant that he placed the inhumanity of the slave trade second to capitalistic gains (Kaplan, 1970). Defoe “*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 the Boyne, but, as with many British monarchs, there was a more heinous side to his rule (Lenihan, 2005; 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). Notably, 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, culture and fostering an environment for staff and students to feel accepted without fear (University of Greenwich, 2021). The university aims to ensure “*equality, diversity and inclusion [is] embedded throughout all [its] structures, processes and behaviours*” (University of Greenwich, 2021, p.30). However, there is a gap between theory and practice in this case. As discussed, colonialism led to some of the largest violent dispossessions of populations across the entire world. Having parts of the university named after ardent supporters of the slave trade arguably does not suggest that it is a safe and inclusive environment for all. 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 that, 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's being embedded in the university's structures, it seems that the imperial legacies of the British Empire are being entrenched, upheld and celebrated.

The UoG would not exist in its current form 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. The aim was to gather their opinions of colonialism, the UoG and decolonisation to answer the research question 'How has the British Empire impacted the UoG'?

Methodology

Research design

Qualitative researchers aim to understand an 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 to investigate what lies behind phenomena (Cypress, 2015; Speziale *et al.*, 2011). Qualitative methods are therefore beneficial in developing original conceptual frameworks or hypotheses (Sofaer, 1999).

For this research project, the researcher sought to ascertain a deeper understanding of staff and student opinions about the British Empire and its links with the University of Greenwich. There is human subjectivity and a "*contextual world of interpretations*" within the topic of colonialism (Cypress, 2015, p.357). To ascertain the most colourful opinions, a qualitative process was taken.

Theoretical framework

Social justice is a political concept that is focused on egalitarianism (Reisch, 2002; Craig *et al.*, 2008; Miller, 2001). Overall, 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. This qualitative research study aims to contribute to social justice in two main ways: 1) by identifying points that need to be addressed or improved; 2) by suggesting alternative solutions to matters that have been identified (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Cypress, 2015).

Participants

In total, four participants were chosen to be interviewed for this research. A Greenwich Students Union (GSU) officer, two lecturers and a student. These participants were recruited through a combination of selective sampling and convenience sampling.

Table 1. Participants

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

Data collection

The interviews were between twenty-five and forty-five minutes long and conducted over Microsoft Teams, owing to COVID-19 restrictions. Thirteen, fourteen or fifteen questions were asked and answers to some of which were probed further. The questions focused on the colonial history of the UoG, how it affects staff and students and what the university can do to confront this history (appendix 1). To recruit participants, an email was sent and included a participant information sheet.

Ethical considerations

Pseudonyms were provided for anonymity. Full ethical approval was granted by the faculty ethics board.

Data analysis

“Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). Thematic analysis may 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 were transcribed, read through and the researcher’s thoughts were written down after each interview (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2013; Braun and Clarke, 2006). Key themes of colonial empire were extracted and this allowed the researcher to delve into the topic and answer the research question: How has the legacy of the British Empire impacted the UoG?

Reflexivity

Using reflexivity, it can be established how one's background plays a part in how research is interpreted and conducted (Swaminathan and Mulvihill, 2018). Acknowledgement of how situations have informed research is needed and this can be done through confessional tales (Van Maanen, 1998).

Findings and discussion

“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 showed reluctance when addressing race. 'White fragility' describes the discomfort and defensiveness that White people evince 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 that 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 as stating that 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, and it seems that some academics are not comfortable about approaching egalitarian ideas linked with equality. The university has recently released a 'Race Action Plan' (RAP) (University of Greenwich, 2022). One key highlight is that the university aims to close the awarding gap between White and Global Majority 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, this pledge seems impossible to achieve if 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 or uncomfortableness is fuelling the maintenance of white supremacy within the university.

“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 world-renowned Cutty Sark. In addition to the imperialistic architecture of the university, the names of several buildings also have ties with the colonial empire. The people the university’s buildings are named after are deeply rooted in slavery. One participant offered personal feelings 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 benefits from Britain’s violent history. Hence, the buildings’ names must be contextualised and historically comprehended to ensure transparency. One participant interviewed shared personal concern about 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, with some claiming that 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 various reasons, two of them particularly significant:

1. 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).
2. To believing renaming buildings removes British culture means there is a lack of ability to comprehend any culture outside Eurocentrism. The honouring of these figures, whose status and privilege rested on the systematic exploitation of the Global South, is harmful and further promotes the normalised societal racism prevalent today. Finally, building names are not history; they are memorialisations. Though the history of these figures will ultimately never be erased, we can begin to eliminate the glorification of colonial figureheads through naming processes.

Article

The UoG's race pledges call for cultural and behavioural changes to eliminate racism in the university. However, these pledges fail to address the fact that academic institutions are inherently violent towards the Global Majority because they are institutions 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 that the construction of race stems from both slavery and colonialism and is perpetuated through imperialism and capitalism (University of Greenwich, 2022, p.8).

“Everything is about empire really”

Ultimately, regardless of how much legislation is 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). 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 academic staff from minority groups and there is an under-representation 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 in the UK (Advance HE, 2021) and, out of all the 22,000 professors in the UK, only forty-one are Black women (WHEN, 2023). Data produced by HESA (2018) also showed out of the 535 university staff employed as "*managers, directors or senior officials*", none was 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, it is clear to see that 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?

Recommendations

This theme discusses the recommendations given by participants to the UoG. During the interview, each individual was asked what the UoG can do to confront its 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 Bethany’s suggestions, the colonial history of the university is something the faculty could also look at hosting a talk on. To educate everyone about those after whom the university buildings are named, an interactive trail could be created, using QR codes placed outside notable buildings such as Queen Anne Court. Individuals might then 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 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 them. There is an opportunity here for the university to research imperial history, how it indirectly benefits from that and to 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 develop their knowledge of racial topics:

“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 colonial society and this means we have internalised an imperialistic way of thought. Since lecturers are not excluded from this, 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 of the Global Majority 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 specifically on 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.

The UoG offers no scholarships directly aimed at Black students, who, more than most, would benefit from them. From the outset, formal education systems polarised people and created an elite. Though certain universities are more accessible to people from a wider range of backgrounds, these institutions’ inherently elitist colonial nature disadvantages the Global Majority, who are hit hardest by maintenance loans too inadequate to cover the UK’s skyrocketing accommodation and living costs; rising student debt is the inevitable consequence (Lewis, 2022; Adams, 2023). The UoG should therefore consider providing scholarships, grants and bursaries to these groups of students.

Elijah also touched upon the fact the university should organise outreach work in local schools: something much needed. Universities are overflowing with a plenitude of knowledge and opportunities to learn. However, because 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 that they will also be equipped with the same knowledge and the prestigious hierarchical gate that guards the university may be dismantled.

Conclusion

This project was carried out to investigate the legacies of the British Empire for UK universities and the UoG in particular. Through the interviews carried out and research done, it is clear that colonial legacies are still present in universities.

After the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement that the murder of George Floyd generated, performative activism has been rife. Arguably, the paradoxical ‘decolonial’ agenda universities have claimed to be working under has, instead of implanting anti-imperialist values, further embedded whiteness. Universities, including Greenwich, have become preoccupied with diversification but representation does not go far enough. The UoG needs to tease out the systems of exploitation that affect those of marginalised groups and lower socio-economic backgrounds. Its commitment to anti-racism is not defined within its RAP or 2030 strategy; it is defined by who makes up their senior staff, who receives the highest grades and who receives the most pay.

Article

Finally, if substantive and tangible changes are to be made, this project has emphasised how important it is – for the UoG and other universities – to push for the interrogation of how these racist structures have manifested themselves. The UoG may wish to consider following the path of the University of Glasgow by making concrete reparative measures and paying back those most adversely affected by slavery (Samson, 2020). The UoG must invest in research concerning their history; it should engage in conversation with students and staff, in order to gain insight into their lived experiences, if it is to succeed in gaining a fuller understanding of how people at the UoG feel and it should pay heed to the solutions they propose. The UoG should have an interest in funding research such as this if it is to achieve its goals – as highlighted in its strategy (University of Greenwich, 2021) – by 2030.

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 anyone from the peripherals of the imperial core 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 the Global South was never meant to comply with Eurocentric norms and the education system has masked the true extent of slavery and the exploitation of Africa. My 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, but 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 about colonial legacies.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Next steps *Probing questions*

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?