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The solidarity bind: narratives on fractures in solidarity and internalised racism in HE

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ABSTRACT

Research into racism within higher education (HE) has reported how faculty and students of colour linger on the periphery of academia due to exclusionary white supremacist ideologies and practices. However, less attention has been paid to how such ideologies and practices are internalised by faculty and students of colour, resulting in resentment and mutually unrealistic expectations. This paper reports on the findings of a small qualitative study conducted within pre- and post-92 British universities, uncovering the experiences of internalised racism of minoritised academics and students at the intersections of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, immigration trajectories and other social markers. Drawing on Critical Race Theory, my findings reveal the participants' critical awareness of how their experiences of internalised racism link to sustaining white supremacy in HE. This paper investigates participant views on the fractures in solidarity and the risk of these concerns being manipulated by white institutions to fit dominant narratives. I present the concept of "solidarity bind", wherein racialised academics and students are expected to foster solidarity with other marginalised academics whilst simultaneously being the target of internalised racism which they are expected to suppress for fear of being labelled "disloyal". The paper concludes by discussing how challenging it can be to disrupt structures in HE, as racialised academics and students wrestle with solidarity bind and struggle to situate this within the broader movement of coalition building.

Introduction

"What if diversity did not have to be diverse?" – Aguirre (2010, p. 766)

In a paper published in 2010, two US-based minoritised academics, Professors Aguirre and Dia, debated the extent to which diversity in academia has benefitted minoritised academics and students. Aguirre (2010) argued that the strides made in increasing diverse representation within Higher Education (HE) had not translated into a more equitable

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and racially-just climate. If anything, the increased diverse representation judged against the concurrent poor outcomes for both minoritised academics and students, suggests that diversity has been commodified and strategically deployed to maintain whiteness in HE. Aguirre's (2010) view does not dismiss initiatives that have created inclusive spaces in HE, rather she is keen to divest from a reliance on successful minority models to expose how merely increasing the numbers of diverse academics and students masks more insidious discriminatory practices and processes, doing little to disturb the racialised hierarchies in HE. In addition, commodification of diversity[1] also perpetuates the myth that we operate in post-racial (Joseph-Salisbury, 2019), meritocratic and equitable environments because this is what the optics of diversity suggest is the case (Alemán & Alemán, 2010). On its own, increasing diverse representation within institutions is insufficient for addressing racial injustice unless there is an interrogation of how whiteness as a capital, as a property, and as a social practice exists within British institutions (Rodgers & Liera, 2023). The argument that many scholars (Alemán & Alemán, 2010; Castagno & Lee, 2007; Pyke, 2010) employ when exposing the pitfalls of tokenistic representation in various sectors, is perfectly captured in Aguirre's question presented above – "What if diversity did not have to be diverse?" (Aguirre, 2010, p. 766). What if the purpose of diversity was never to attain social and racial equity, but rather to protect a system that privileges whiteness? If this is taken to be true, then minoritised academics' potential to be change agents is reduced, as whiteness is still the basis through which all diversity initiatives are defined. In that sense, minoritised faculties are rewarded for serving the interests of the dominant group, but if they challenge them then they are viewed as a liability to maintaining the project of whiteness. Aguirre's (2010) concern about the commodification of minoritised faculty also leads us to consider the insidious ways in which racism and internalised racism are deployed to maintain the facade of diverse universities whilst ensuring its diverse workforce continues to reinforce its hegemonic beliefs and practices. This paper offers an original and significant contribution to how minoritised faculty and students situate internalised racism within the broader project of whiteness, as well as how they imagine this impacts solidarity-work.

What is internalised racism?

> "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" – South African antiapartheid activist Stephen Biko (1978)

This paper engages with some of the pressing concerns raised by Aguirre (2010) and others through the lens of internalised racism and how it manifests in HE. This paper reports on the findings of a small-scale qualitative study based on the narratives of minoritised academics and students, all of whom have experienced acts of internalised racism perpetrated by other minoritised academics and students in HE. Broadly defined, internalised racism is understood as a form of oppression whereby racialised individuals become tools for white supremacy by embodying self-hatred, self-doubt, and self-blame towards oneself and other members of their racialised community. Lipsky writes that internalised racism " … is this turning upon ourselves, upon our families, and upon our own people the distress patterns that result from the racism and oppression of the majority society" (1977, p.6). Others theorise that internalised racism is a function of white supremacy, where there is no need for a white oppressor because racialised individuals have

internalised stereotypes and deficit views perpetuated by the racist ideology of the dominant group (Fanon, 1952; Hall, 1986; Khalifa, 2015; Pyke, 2010).

Internalised racism has also been researched in scholarship with different minoritised communities. For instance, in the USA, Lipsky (1977) examined the role of internalised racism within Black communities, whilst Pyke (2010) focused on Korean and Vietnamese American communities, and Prashad (2000) looked at anti-Blackness in Asian Americans. In Canada and Australia, research by Mzinegiizhigo-kwe Bédard (2018), and Whyman et al. (2021) has explored similar concepts such as the effects of "lateral violence" within indigenous and Aboriginal communities, and how the tools of colonisers such as social exclusion and bullying ensure the subjugation of and silencing within these racialised communities. Concepts similar to internalised racism have been documented within scholarship such as "self-hatred" (Gilman, 1986), "inter-cultural-violence" (Dudgeon, 2000), "defensive othering" (Schwalbe et al., 2000), "mental colonization" (bell hooks, 2003), "anti-self-issue" (Brown, 2003), and "lateral oppression" (David & Derthick, 2017).

Whilst internalised racism has been extensively researched and theorised within the field of psychology in relation to self-esteem, anxiety, wellbeing, hopelessness, stress, depression, body dissatisfaction, and other variables (David et al., 2019; Molina & James, 2016), it has been largely ignored within the field of sociology. Pyke (2010) puts this hesitance down to four main reasons; firstly, the reactive response of fear that the cause of internalised racism will be wrongly attributed to the racialised individual and/or minority group's own failings, and may further perpetuate the fallacy that we live in a post-racial society where white privilege and racism no longer determine the experiences of racialised communities. It could also undermine minoritised experiences of discrimination by hinting that minorities can be discriminatory towards their own and that "anyone" can be a racist. A second more academic rationale is the theoretical preoccupation with resistance narratives within race and racism scholarship. Pyke (2010) argues that whilst scholarship on resistance is important for liberatory struggles, it fails to address contradictions by focusing on individual merit and self-determination, dismissing the intersecting nature of different oppressive power structures that limit collective agency. This also risks leaning into scholarship that reinforces the myth of the model minority and exceptionalism (Gillborn, 2006; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). It is possible that members of the oppressed group who survive the oppressive system and rise through the ranks could be presented as examples of resilience, thereby keeping attention diverted from the oppressive structures. A third and closely related justification is that it may dismiss the possibility that a minoritised individual's success came as a consequence of compromises and complicity, which does not correspond with the "theoretical hegemony of resistance" (Pyke, 2010, p. 560) which rests on binary representations of oppressors and victims (Aguirre, 2010). Collins (1993) suggests that "once we realize that there are few pure victims or oppressors, and that each one of us derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression that frame our lives, then we will be in a position to see the need for new ways of thought and action" (p. 26). This necessitates the need for an intersectional lens to examine and understand people's experiences of social inequality, which are not situated along a single axis of social division (such as race) but are rather at the intersection of multiple axes (such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, immigrant status, social class, etc.), creating specific sites of oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989). The fourth final factor is the risk that

it could reproduce racial essentialism. Any focus on complicity may reinforce the notion that all minoritised people ascribe to shared beliefs and practices, and anyone who exhibits complicity or accommodation with the oppressor is not a "real" minority. This type of essentialism again conceals the oppressive structures that ensnare all racialised subjects (Collins, 1993). The above discussion also contextualises some of the narratives that participants provided in the current study about internalised racism, and the pressure that they felt in sharing their experiences within their own networks.

Internalised racism in educational settings

Internalised racism has been examined in an educational context from different perspectives in school and university settings (Abrica et al., 2020; Harper, 2007; Khalifa, 2015; Kohli, 2014; Ortega, 2021). For instance, Kohli (2014) examined how teacher trainees in the USA from minoritised communities enrolled in social justice-oriented urban teacher education programmes, which reflected their own experiences and/or practices of internalising racism and the dangers of replicating these problematic beliefs in their own classrooms. For many participants in Kohli's study, negative racial messages about them personally and/or their communities were hidden within school curriculums, classroom conversations, the way teacher colleagues talked to them, and in the absence of celebrations of self-worth and ethnic pride within their own communities. Whilst the participants' critical awareness around racial liberation began in college, Kohli (2014) posited that unlearning internalised racism was a continual process for these teacher trainees that required constant reflection. In a similar vein, Ortega (2021), in his autoethnographic account, reflects on how his earlier experiences as a Columbian Latinx non-white teacher educator were largely shaped by colonial logics, which led him to believe in the deception of his own inferiority and consequently in the superiority of white people, rejecting his own *Colombianidad* identity all in the hope of becoming a successful educator.

Research into internalised racism within educational settings has also explored how Black students experience anti-Blackness not only by their Latina/o/x peers, but also faculty members at minority serving institutions (MSIs) (Abrica et al., 2020). In a historically Hispanic serving university, Abrica et al. (2020) interviewed Black students and shed light on how anti-Blackness operated through the rejection of Black intellect, accusing Black students of cheating the system, making Black students either invisible or hypervisible within classrooms, and the persistent threat of anti-Black violence within and outside the campus. The authors argue that if anti-Blackness is demanded from non-Black racialised students and faculty, and is rewarded within every day institutional practices, little can be done to foster solidarity within different marginalised groups. Abrica et al. (2020) provide key insights into how any analysis of white hegemony is incomplete without considering its roots in anti-Blackness. Within a HE context, their study reminds us of our complicity and proximity to racist structures and the everyday violence that our Black colleagues face from other racialised individuals.

Methodology

The current study was conducted in 2020 during the pandemic. Whilst universities were adjusting their own regulations around working from home, they were forced to address

the brutal murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 and how normalised racism and anti-Black violence is within HE. I mention these two events because they provided the final impetus to pursue a topic that had been brewing for some time in my professional space. Whereas universities offered "listening sessions" to their staff and students about how to address racism in universities, and recruited equality, diversity and inclusion posts as a gesture of their commitment (Thomas III et al., 2024), minoritised academics underwent our own moment of consciousness in private academic chat forums, talking about oppressors from within our own communities who had traded racial justice for proximity to power. Having been in HE for quite some time, first as a student and later as an academic, I had my own experiences as a first-generation immigrant British-Pakistani Muslim woman of suffering internalised racism by peers and faculty members. Like Ortega (2021), I recognised that my own upbringing would have been influenced by colonial logics, and that I must constantly reflect on how I could be enacting these oppressive logics within my professional space. Regrettably, I learnt from my racialised colleagues and students that internalised racism was a common occurrence, despite not being discussed publicly.

The research was designed as a small-scale qualitative project concerned in addressing the following research questions:

- What are the reasons why different racialised groups (staff, students and faculty) enact racism towards each other?
- How do racialised faculty, staff and students recount past acts of internalised racism towards each other?
- How does racial hierarchy sustain racist structures in higher education institutions?

I had intended to utilise a combination of semi-structured interviews with 20 students and staff members at different HE settings, and a collaborative and innovative methodology of collective memory work as a form of "unsettling methodology".[2] However, I quickly realised that potential participants were suffering from racial battle fatigue[3] (Martin, 2015) at that time, and that I needed to ensure care was embedded at every stage of the data collection process. This involved soliciting suggestions from a private online group of racialised academics within HE in the UK and US, asking them what care resources they wanted the research process to include. Based on their suggestions, I provided books, digital resources and links to therapeutic services post-interview that specifically addressed healing from racial trauma.

Ultimately, I decided to conduct only semi-structured interviews with nine participants which collectively produced 15 h of transcribed interviews. All interviews were thematically analysed, and I also included a priori categories highlighted within literature to develop stronger and more coherent themes. The participants belonged to diverse backgrounds from a mix of traditional "red brick" universities and post-92 universities, including junior and senior level academics, and undergraduate and postgraduate students.

One of the most significant challenges that I faced was recruiting participants who were comfortable enough to share their experiences, and not be fearful that their narratives would be used to either reinforce the problematic notion that anyone can be a racist, or lead to generalisations that all senior minoritised faculty have risen to their positions based on their ability to seek proximity to whiteness. In many ways, preliminary

understandings of participant views on internalised racism began even before the interviews because potential participants were concerned about solidarity bind, a notion that I expand upon later. I was a part of several private online social networks for minoritised academics and students in the UK and engaged in a network-based sampling technique to recruit participants. In many instances I carried out "pre-interview" conversations where participants were able to learn about the project, my positionality and how their data would be used. Some potential participants still refused to be interviewed as they felt that they could be identified by their narratives, and this concern for privacy was paramount to the research process. However, once the interviews had commenced participants expressed how they found the process to be affirming and cathartic. For anonymity and confidentiality purposes, I intentionally omitted a detailed demographic/geographic break-up of the sample. However, participant narratives in the findings include some details about their identity and positionality that are central to their experiences of internalised racism, and importantly what they felt comfortable sharing publicly. I followed all ethical procedures as set out by my university's ethical committee and the BERA Guidelines for Educational Research. This paper reports on my participants' narratives on how internalised racism creates fractures in solidarity among racialised academics and students, and the burden that many participants experience in confronting it.

Theoretical framework

My research was underpinned by Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and the Black feminist lens of intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Central to CRT is the principle that racism is deeply embedded within the fabric of society, and is normalised and permanently operational. CRT also presents a theorising space for anti-racist scholars rather than one static theoretical framework (Gillborn, 2006). Therefore, in its various iterations, CRT seeks to dismantle the myth of objectivity and meritocracy that sustains white cultural and institutional hegemony, and foster counter-narratives that challenge hidden and subtle forms of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Another principle of CRT that illustrates how racialised hierarchies are sustained is interest convergence. Interest convergence is a concept introduced by Derrick Bell in 1980 to examine the motivations behind the advancement of civil rights in the USA. Bell (1980) argued that the rights of Black Americans were recognised not due to white altruism or a mainstream moral awakening, but rather because the rights of Black Americans happened to converge with the interests of white America and did not disturb the existing racialised hierarchy. Interest-convergence has generated mixed opinions among critical scholars, with some delving deeper into why racial justice takes a back seat when interests are converged, whereas others have looked at it as a political and tactical approach to making measured advances in racial justice (Alemán and Alemán,2010; Castagno & Lee, 2007). The principle of interest-convergence is useful in understanding the findings of the current research on fractures in solidarity across racialised groups in HE, and the complicity of powerful racialised members in maintaining white hegemony. A final tenet that has proved useful is including an intersectional analysis in this research (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). An intersectional analysis challenges essentialism or a reductive analysis of one's racialised experiences, and instead uncovers multiple interlocking

oppressive structures that intersect with our identities. Its relevance to the current research cannot be overstated particularly because it can highlight multiple loyalties and complicities that shape the nature of solidarity movements in HE.

Findings and discussion

I developed three main themes after conducting a thematic analysis: [1] the price of speaking out; [2] bargains in institutional approaches to diversity; and [3] cleaning our own house. This paper specifically examines the narratives of solidarity, and the fractures in solidarity that became visible in the second and third themes.

The price of speaking out

Participants in this study recognised that HE, like any sector or institution, is rooted in pre-serving whiteness and they feared that their grievances once made public would conceal the real perpetrator, a concern previously shared by Pyke (2010). Naturally, they felt betrayed by another racialised person using their power to enact acts of internalised racism against them. However, once the incidents were in the public domain, they were concerned that their institutions would feel emboldened to promote the idea that anyone can be racist in a "post-racial" society. A significant finding that quickly became apparent during data collection and analysis, was how participants felt trapped between feeling betrayed on the one hand and the wider implications of voicing that betrayal on the other. Here, I introduce the term "solidarity bind" to represent this dilemma, wherein my participants were the target of internalised racism by other minoritised academics/students in positions of power, and were expected, almost com-pelled, to consider the consequent harm it may bring to efforts towards building solidarity in HE once these acts are shared publicly within a white space. Participants questioned how transparent and objective the process was for reporting grievances. They reflected that airing one's dirty laundry in public comes with the assumption that the public space is "clean", free from inherent white supremacist ideology, and that bringing light to such dark places would disinfect the space from racism. The reality, however, is the opposite, in that HE has always existed as a white space (Ahmed, 2017), and airing such acts could enable white supremacy to sustain in more insidious ways. My partici-pants' solidarity bind arose because of a fear that the real perpetrators of oppression would be deliberately not held accountable. Whilst "solidarity bind" is a helpful term to understand the dilemmas in voicing internalised racism, it could arguably be used to understand other groups, e.g. how women in junior positions feel about sharing their views on "queen bee phenomena" (Derks et al., 2016).

Participants used terms such as "structure", "the institute" and "the machine" to refer to white supremacist structures in HE. For instance, Rewa, a South Asian early career researcher who was publicly "disciplined" by a senior professor from a minoritised back-ground. Rewa reported that this incident woke her up to harsh realities of academia, where powerful racialised academics "pull the ladder up" and stay invested in maintaining hierarchies in HE instead of fostering a sense of solidarity with other racialised students and academics.

> Rewa: I felt betrayed because there weren't many people who look like her who were senior … so her rejection was almost like she was rejecting people who look like her … when I say betrayal it's because there's so few of us up there … We've then got to wait for the next person, whenever that's going to be, and afterwards will we have the energy to do what we want to do?

Rewa's account reflects the current state of HE where diverse representation is not diverse in practice (Sensoy & Diangelo, 2017). As there are very few minoritised academics in senior positions, when such incidents occur it deals a blow to the possibilities of receiving mentoring by community elders (Avent et al., 2024). For Rewa, when minoritised academics in positions of power create fractures in community building, it harms efforts to dismantle white supremacy in HE because for many academics and students situated in the lower hierarchies, they are losing one of their own who is in a position of power to help them transform HE. When I asked Rewa if her grievance should have been reported to the institution or even publicly voiced, she immediately expressed her distrust in the university.

> Rewa: It depends how it's used and who by … as academics of colour, we're watched in university spaces to ensure we're okay to be here … We're not a threat to the institute's values and principles … you don't know how that's going to be used against you by the institute. To say, well, this is what came across … unfortunately, your next promotion isn't going to happen. If the same thing had happened to a white male academic, it might just have had zero impact.

For Rewa and the other participants, it was clear that HE as a space was invariably positioned to punish minoritised academics more than white academics for the same offences, and hence disciplinary actions were not race-neutral. This also reflects a key principle of CRT, exposing the myth of objectivity and revealing that HE does not offer equal protections and rights to all groups, and that when it comes to making a public display of objectivity HE will inevitably throw minoritised individuals "under the bus" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Participants were aware that senior management in "the institute" were surveilling both them and their oppressor (a minoritised academic) to ensure the equilibrium for maintaining whiteness was not disturbed.

Two other participants, Soha, an African Muslim female international student who had been bullied by a minoritised male Muslim academic, and Tristan, a Black British male academic who had experienced disciplining by more senior minoritised academics and management, reported similar apprehensions about how their grievances could be manipulated to serve white interests in HE.

> Soha: There's fear of speaking out openly without being vilified as ignoring the bigger issue or harming the only few [senior minoritised academics] we have … Especially when there's a racist white professor and a racist Brown professor, you complain about both of them … will they just pick on the Brown one? I'd want both of them held responsible. I don't want the Brown person being an example of how f***** up our community is … but because of the power dynamic, I worry they'll throw this Brown person under the bus to save the structure.
>
> Tristan: I don't consider myself a colluder with oppression. Not exposing that it's happening is collusion. It's about being strategic. How do we use whatever we have to effect change? Do we give people the means to beat us up? We give people tools that we don't control which they manipulate and turn our voices against

us, even when our voice was about them. So this is really complex ... we try to manoeuvre but we're constantly outmanoeuvred.

All participants not only knew that such betrayal exists, but also that acts of internalised racism habitually help to distract everyone from the main oppressors. It was more difficult to "critique regimes of racism" (Khalifa, 2015, p. 264) enacted by fellow minoritised academics, than it was to critique those enacted by white academics. Interestingly, both Soha and Tristan reflected that publicising acts of internalised racism could inadvertently harm the already limited diverse group within HE, ultimately leading to collusion with the institution, the main culprit. As Tristan puts it, minoritised academics must employ strategic thinking in their efforts to dismantle whiteness in HE to avoid being outmanoeuvred by powerful structures. An aspect of being outmanoeuvred involved this imposed solidarity bind that many minoritised academics and students feel when they are oppressed by their own community members. There was critical consciousness among participants of being used as "tools", a means of punishing their community as their own testimonies could be used to subjugate them further. Interestingly, every participant in this study attempted to condone the acts of internalised racism they had faced, feeling that such encounters had made them more cognisant of certain individuals who "looked" like them who were wedded to systems of oppression, leading them to be more cautious in their solidarity-work.

Bargains in institutional approaches to diversity

Similar to the concerns raised by Aguirre (2010), participants in my study viewed their aggressors as minoritised individuals in authority who knew all too well how proximity to power is sought within HE, and the bargains they make with institutions so that both parties benefit. These bargains inevitably affect the progress that minoritised groups overall make in HE. For my participants, minorities who upheld the racist structure and did not disturb the racial order in HE were viewed as undermining solidarity-work. HE benefitted from their tokenistic representation whilst not making any substantial contribution to equity. For instance, Sadiya, British South Asian academic who was bullied by a senior minoritised male academic, suggested the university recognised that this individual had attracted many complaints but because they needed him at a time when they were working to improve their image as regards diversity, they let his offences go unpunished.

Author: Did the university's senior management view them [the aggressor] differently from you?
Sadiya: Very differently because otherwise he wouldn't be a professor, but they're aware of both sides [negatives and positives] because, obviously, all complaints go to them [to investigate] ... they realise they need him for his public face.
Author: Do you think he's punished or rewarded by the university?
Sadiya: He was rewarded because even after the formal complaints, he was promoted to professor ... I was shocked, what's he done to merit professorship? No substantial publications, no substantial funding ... the women who complained ... we chose to leave because they [senior management] don't want to interfere in minority matters and be portrayed negatively. They don't want to be telling Brown people to not be racist towards Black people, because there's more evidence

white people are most racist anyway. So, it could be a face-saving thing. This person [the aggressor] obviously brings lots of PR positives for the university, so that's important for them. They can't afford to lose that. But if they lose these women, well there's lots of academics who'll apply for those jobs.

When my participants discussed how their university dealt with their aggressors, they reported that the university not only looked the other way but actively rewarded their aggressor with promotion and greater authority despite knowing about their misconduct informally or often formally. The lens of interest-convergence (Alemán & Alemán, 2010; Castagno & Lee, 2007) can be used to analyse the motivations underpinning such "bargains with the devil". Khalifa (2015) suggests that often in areas that are ethnically diverse, minoritised individuals are specifically recruited into senior positions so that they can keep minoritised communities in check and discipline them where needed. In such cases, the powerful minoritised individuals and the even more powerful institutions align themselves to serve their own interests, and hence the violence enacted by a senior minoritised individual towards a more junior minoritised individual is often left unchallenged precisely because the aggressor is also minoritised (Khalifa, 2015). To some extent the aggressors in these situations "get away" with abusing their power, because they are simultaneously preserving white hegemony. As Nadiya put it, her aggressor expected that the university would not interfere in "minority matters" because crucially he provides the university with tokenistic representation of diversity. It is important to note that the protection offered to the aggressors is only temporary provided that they uphold white hegemony and perform scripts of good assimilation. Sadiya's narrative also highlights how the myth of meritocracy goes hand in hand with institutionalised racism. It did not matter that her aggressor did not meet the criteria to achieve professorship, he was rewarded as long as he willingly performed the role of gatekeeper to marginalised academics.

Participants also demonstrated awareness that their aggressors had been socialised into whiteness so that they believe it is natural not to question the erasure of their own communities, thus relieving the university from having to actively interfere and discipline minorities. For instance, Alexis, a Black sessional female academic who had been systematically bullied by a senior male academic, referred to her aggressor's complacency as "not making any waves" with the university, of riding out his retirement, and of deliberately silencing any troublemakers. To Alexis, this bargain was a "win-win" because it enabled the aggressor to abuse his power over minoritised academics in more precarious posts, whilst making the university look good on diversity statistics. The university did not interfere with regard to the aggressor's conduct. Crucially, by actively creating obstacles to Alexis' career progression, the aggressor ensured that the university only had room for one type of diversity: him.

Alexis: He's not making any waves. He's institutionalised … he's the chairman of two very popular disciplines … he's ticking their equality box … It's a win-win situation for him and the school. He's got Black academics under him, whether he's treating them like crap is irrelevant.

Alexis also believed that other minoritised academics knew about the obnoxious and hostile behaviour of this aggressor but they were powerless to do anything about it because he was "backed" by the institution, so that if it came to confronting his

aggressor's behaviour the university would always favour him. All participants in this research reported that their aggressor had committed similar acts of internalised racism with other minoritised academics and students, and that it was an open secret in their workplace. Many minoritised academics avoided their respective aggressors if at all possible because they knew that he/she was never going to be held to account.

> Alexis: You can't get rid of him … if you went up against him, the university would always favour him … they're never gonna get rid of him. Until he retires then they'll find a white person to fill the role.

Another participant, Sekaye, a Black female senior academic, when discussing her own experiences with a much more senior male academic, suggested that aggressors often know how to strike the right balance between representing the university and their community, even if that representation is inauthentic on both fronts.

> Sekaye: Frankly, they bring in a lot of money, they're a senior person of colour … that's always good for institutions. They're good at balancing institutional dynamics with solidarity dynamics, finding that line.

Sekaye's account provides an interesting perspective on how interest convergence is used as a strategic tool to make small gains for minoritised academics and students (Alemán & Alemán, 2010). It is possible that the aggressor has multiple loyalties, and whilst they are willing to use their power to discipline members of their own community due to internalised white racist ideology, they still care about how contributions of diverse academics are viewed by the wider university. This speaks to Collins' (1993) concern that solidarity-work is more complicated than it usually is because we are rarely positioned as "pure victims or oppressors" (p. 26) – hence solidarity-work entails confronting multiple localities we have towards our institutions, and our communities, and recognising our own roles in sustaining racialised hierarchies. Without excusing their toxic conduct towards more vulnerable minoritised academics and students, one can understand how aggressors may choose to walk this toxic institutional path using the small gains that may or not lead to bigger changes in HE as justification. Nevertheless, all participants believed that their aggressors had garnered less objections within HE because they had been presented under the guise of celebrating diversity (Ahmed, 2017). Ahmed (2017) suggests that aggressors can go undetected and uncontested because university initiatives such as "commitment to increasing diverse representation" leave a paper trail, which maintains evidence that the university is committed to equality even when equality does not result from the initiative.

Cleaning our own house

Perhaps the most uplifting and yet provocative theme was around what it takes to engage in sustainable long-term solidarity-work in HE. Participants acknowledged that solidarity-work was never going to be easy, since one cannot force members of their own community to align with identity-based interests. They suggested that solidarity-work should be seen as a relational practice which takes time to identify existing fractures and understand its contentious nature. Therefore, as a starting point racialised academics and students must examine their own complicity in internalised racism and their roles in

sustaining whiteness more broadly. Solidarity-work means confronting the difficult truth that every minoritised individual needs to commit to dismantling white supremacist ideologies and practices in HE, and understand their role in this work. For participants, it was tricky as to how they undertake this, because they can either feed into the machine or liberate themselves. Many of them preferred to call these aggressors out within a space safe from white surveillance. It meant holding uncomfortable conversations with those who had internalised their racism and sought protection in the Master's House (Lorde, 1984). This inevitably carried a high professional and emotional cost because minoritised faculty and students felt pressured into leaving their institutions. In such instances, the responsibility should lie with those in less precarious positions within the collective – such as senior and secure minoritised members who feel either too detached from how this will impact them in the long-run, or who are led to believe that staying silent will shield them from these aggressors – to step up. In order to unlearn internalised racism and dismantle white supremacy, powerful racialised members need to be held to account in solidarity-work. This also reinforces my participants' perspectives that any true liberation or emancipation movement involves leaving no one behind, because there are no "pure" enemies from an intersectional viewpoint. In the conversations below, Aaron, a Black male early career researcher, and Tristan, a senior Black male academic (introduced earlier in the paper), reveal why as minoritised academics they needed to understand these acts of internalised racism in order to take down the "machine".

> Aaron: Take Priti Patel [ex-Home Secretary] as an example … we aren't in a place where my critique of her will be understood with nuance. It's only gonna feed the machine … I hope you're feeling my discomfort. This is the tension. Take Diane Abbott [ex-Shadow Home Secretary] … I remember she was character assassinated whatever she did, and she did a lot more right than wrong. But it didn't matter because of the space we're in, and that's a hill that I'm prepared to die on. Priti Patel and Diane Abbott embody those two positions in HE … I can't understand the violence they're perpetrating. I need to understand it because when the revolution comes … then everybody's gotta come with us … if anybody's left behind, we've got a problem … we want both Priti and Diane with us being emancipated. If Priti wants to come with us, which I don't think she does.

Aaron citing political figures might seem unusual, however, nearly all participants referred to Priti Patel to demonstrate why diverse representation does not equate to progressing social justice causes. Aaron's testimony displays awareness that institutions underpinned by white supremacist ideology tolerate diversity if they adhere to scripts that reinforce white superiority as a form of capital (MadhavaRau, 2021; Rodgers & Liera, 2023). Aaron recognises that Priti Patel, despite seeking proximity to whiteness and breaking the solidarity front, has also been weaponised by the institution to serve a particular purpose, i.e. ensuring solidarity never develops between different minoritised communities. For Aaron, hating Priti Patel would merely assist the machine by perpetuating the cycle of internalised racism. Instead, he suggested waiting and hoping that she develops critical consciousness with time to engage with liberation struggles. He also compares her tokenistic representation with Diane Abbott, a political figure who has historically been silenced by political institutions. For him, like any institution, HE perpetuates the "post-racial" myth and is unwilling to confront its violent relationship with white supremacist

ideology. Hence, any shortcomings of Priti Patel will always be racialised, even if she is complicit in enacting the Master's logic that racialises and others her (Lorde, 1984). From a CRT perspective, holding her complicity accountable must come from within minoritised communities, since institutions will never admit to having racialised hierarchies that serve their interests.

Aaron struggles with his role in holding Priti Patel to account, to even recognise her role in the solidarity struggle because it asks individuals like Aaron and Tristan to be at the forefront, even after all the forms of racism they have experienced, undertaking the emotional labour of calling out internalised racism until every minoritised individual is committed to dismantling whiteness. Understandably, Aaron is more welcoming to someone like Dianne Abbott because he can relate to how she has been punished by political institutions for challenging racism. Despite their polarised positions in the same space, Aaron describes how solidarity-work needs both minoritised allies and oppressors.

> Tristan: When George Floyd happened, I wrote to various [minoritised] senior management across the board, but only two people responded … one said, "I'm just an administrator, I don't have any power" sort of thing, and the other said "Why are you outing us? … putting our names on this, copying us into this message, we've become targets". I thought, "Isn't that your role? … Why aren't you doing what I'm doing?" … when I look up at him in that position, I've got an expectation what he should be doing … I'm disappointed but not surprised.

Tristan is visibly frustrated and feels betrayed by minoritised leaders for not using their power and privilege to question institutional racism. For Tristan, everyone must play their role in dismantling white supremacist ideology and be prepared to realise the cost this entails. Ahmed (2017) suggests that when people of colour call out acts of racism or sexism, they are in effect flagging that racist/sexist act for others who have failed to recognise that issue. By calling out racist norms, people of colour make the situation more tense for fellow people of colour. They have disrupted the equilibrium, implicating other people of colour by association who may not want to be labelled troublemakers. Tristan describes how minoritised individuals, even those with substantial power, may feel hesitant in positioning themselves in opposition to the institution because they do not want to risk being perceived as a threat. In staying silent on issues requiring accountability, they also expose the limitations of the interest convergence principle because institutions are only interested in promoting minoritised individuals into senior leadership positions as long as they do not challenge the status quo (Castagno & Lee, 2007). When I asked Tristan if he thought that he could deal with the machine on his own, since others are not as invested as he is, he responded,

> Tristan: Surviving oppression often turns good people into someone who inflicts the same oppression … people choose what they consider good for them going forward. When people say you're sticking your head above the parapet, whatever happens to you, it's like you deserve it … if you're free but I'm not, then none of us is free … what's trapping us? … So for me, clean your own house first, then call out other people. Start there and then move outwards.

Tristan's account speaks to the Freirean notion that in a racially capitalist white supremacist institution, ultimately the oppressed may give in and "shadow" the oppressor (Freire, 2000; Rodgers & Liera, 2023). Additionally, whilst the aggressors may be enacting the

dominant script now, they might possibly be so accustomed to being undermined over the years in a white space, that they do not recognise they are no longer oppressed in every dynamic. Their more established senior self may be the oppressor in certain contexts because they have gained promotions and prestige over the years; but they still act with a defensiveness that they wish they possessed when they were precarious (Collins, 1993). Tristan recognised that his real anger was not with those in his community who had internalised racism, but with the machine that had created division in the community and presented itself as the only place of refuge. This also resonates with bell hooks' (1995) concern regarding some minoritised individuals who fear that "if they do not conform to white-determined standards of acceptable behavior that they will not survive" (p. 15); hence, they perform diversity in the way that is acceptable to the institution. Like Aaron, Tristan believed that rather than shying away from the fact that certain minoritised individuals in the academy had invested in the assimilation model, he needed to confront and convince them that they cannot withdraw from collective liberation. There was a focus on "cleaning the house" before moving on to take down wider institutional structures.

Concluding discussion

At the beginning, I shared concerns raised by Professors Aguirre and Dia (Aguirre, 2010) about the implications of having a diversified workforce in academia that has internalised white hegemonic standards and practices. Aguirre (2010) calls to attention the insidious ways in which white supremacist ideology and neoliberal values work in tandem to prevent the transformative potential of having a diverse workforce. My own research reveals that minoritised academics and students who enact internalised racism, act as gatekeepers to academic success for their own communities. By embracing the neoliberal values of individualism and competitiveness, aggressors were only able to sustain a culture of internalised racism because they could conceal it within the neoliberal expectations of what it takes to be successful in HE. Since these individuals align themselves with institutions that are underpinned by white supremacist ideology, they prioritise proximity to power over fostering community ties within academia. My participants, despite their feelings of distrust and betrayal towards their aggressors, experienced what I term "solidarity bind". Any critique of internalised racism risked being weaponised by the institution to perpetuate myths like "anyone can be racist", or conversely questioning their complaint by asserting our "post-racial society". In examining the relationship between solidarity bind and wider work involved in fostering solidarity, it is apparent from participant narratives that confronting problematic, even violent community relationships is emotionally taxing, and is often accepted as part of existing in a racially capitalist white space. Acts of internalised racism, and the aggressors who commit them, have somehow been normalised without being simultaneously incorporated into broader discussions on racism. Espino and Croom (2022) suggest that part of coalition-building relies on addressing our problematic histories with those in our community. It requires all of us to show our vulnerabilities and loyalties so that we can overcome the hurdle of false binaries between authentic and inauthentic minorities, and instead explore how we are all implicated and racialised in this white space (Collins, 1993). Failure to do so will put us in a similar predicament to Rewa, when she stated that you do not know when the next powerful minoritised academic

will appear to support your liberation. More importantly, if it happens, will we "have the energy to do what we want to do?"

It is also acknowledged that most of the heavy-lifting for solidarity-work is done by those who are doubly targeted by racism; firstly, by white institutions, and secondly by members of their own community who have been socialised into whiteness by the institution. My research reveals that working towards liberation within HE is far more nuanced than simply recognising explicit forms of racism, diversifying the workforce, performative attempts to decolonise the curriculum, or even expecting minorities in vulnerable positions to become troublemakers needed for change. Diversity must be constantly reviewed and challenged, because periodically it fails to advance racial justice. Therefore, solidarity-work must be viewed not as the endgame, but rather as an ongoing political strategy that continuously keeps us accountable about how we conduct ourselves in a white space.

Notes

1. Aguirre (2010) and Alemán and Alemán (2010) both posit that in neoliberal HE spaces, diverse representation is often viewed as a commodity that can be measured, assigned a value or used to determine resource allocation.
2. Springgay and Truman (2019) discuss how racialised artists and scholars can develop methodologies that "unsettle" the status quo thereby revealing the pervasiveness of white supremacy in HE. A methodology that unsettles often operates outside of colonial and neoliberal ways of thinking and opens up new possibilities for challenging dominant systems.
3. Martin (2015) defines Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) as "energy expended on coping with and fighting racism that is exacted on racially marginalized and stigmatized groups" (p. xv).

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