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The 'post-decolonial' moment?
Radical pedagogies in UK Higher Education in historical perspective

O momento "pós-decolonial"?
Uma perspetiva histórica das pedagogias radicais no ensino superior britânico

Le moment "post-décolonial"?
Une perspective historique sur les pédagogies radicales dans l'enseignement supérieur britannique

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Abstract

This article maps the history of antiracist pedagogies in UK Higher Education (HE). The article presents the argument that we are currently in a 'post-decolonial' phase following the increasing traction of recent decolonising movements, particularly in the wake of the resurgence of Black Lives Matter UK in the summer of 2020. UK HE institutions have co-opted the language of decolonisation and have sought to address staff and student concerns through liberal/ neoliberal initiatives that do not address the colonial roots of inequities in these institutions. Yet, there is a longer history of antiracist pedagogy in UK HE, and the legacies of this continue to be called upon for continuing antiracist pedagogical work today. Crucially, neoliberalism and anti-Blackness are identified as key concerns in the contemporary context. This history will be significant for scholars of education, as the article provides analysis of key case studies of antiracist pedagogical approaches employed in the UK HE context, as well as scholars across fields who wish to implement antiracist and other radical pedagogies into their teaching practice.

Keywords: radical, antiracist, pedagogy, decolonial, post-decolonial, neoliberalism

Resumo

Este artigo mapeia a história das pedagogias antirracistas no Ensino Superior (ES) do Reino Unido. O artigo apresenta o argumento de que estamos atualmente numa fase "pós-decolonial", na sequência da crescente tração dos recentes movimentos de descolonização, particularmente no ressurgimento do *Black Lives Matter UK* no verão de 2020. As instituições de ES do Reino Unido cooptaram a linguagem da descolonização e procuraram responder às preocupações de profissionais e estudantes através de iniciativas liberais/neoliberais que não contemplam as raízes coloniais das desigualdades nestas instituições. No entanto, existe uma longa história de pedagogia antirracista no ensino superior do Reino Unido, cujos legados continuam a ser necessários no trabalho pedagógico antirracista atual. Em particular, o neoliberalismo e a anti-Negritude são identificados como preocupações fundamentais no contexto contemporâneo. Esta história será significativa para os/as estudiosos/as da educação, uma vez que o artigo fornece uma análise dos principais estudos de caso de abordagens pedagógicas antirracistas empregues no contexto do ensino superior britânico, bem como de outras áreas que pretendam implementar pedagogias antirracistas e outras pedagogias radicais na sua prática de ensino.

Palavras-chave: radical, antirracista, pedagogia, decolonial, pós-decolonial, neoliberalismo

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Résumé
Cet article retrace l'histoire des pédagogies antiracistes dans l'enseignement supérieur britannique. Il présente l'argument selon lequel nous sommes actuellement dans une phase "post-décoloniale", suite à la traction croissante des récents mouvements de décolonisation, en particulier dans la résurgence de Black Lives Matter UK au cours de l'été 2020. Les établissements d'enseignement supérieur britanniques ont coopté le langage de la décolonisation et ont cherché à répondre aux préoccupations des professionnels et des étudiants par des initiatives libérales/néolibérales qui ne s'attaquent pas aux racines coloniales des inégalités dans ces établissements. Cependant, il existe une longue histoire de pédagogie antiraciste dans l'enseignement supérieur britannique, dont les héritages restent nécessaires dans le travail pédagogique antiraciste d'aujourd'hui. En particulier, le néolibéralisme et l'anti-noirité sont identifiés comme des préoccupations majeures dans le contexte contemporain. Cet historique sera important pour les spécialistes de l'éducation, car l'article fournit une analyse des principales études de cas des approches pédagogiques antiracistes employées dans le contexte de l'enseignement supérieur britannique, ainsi que dans d'autres domaines souhaitant mettre en œuvre des pédagogies antiracistes et d'autres pédagogies radicales dans leur pratique d'enseignement.
Mots-clés: radical, antiraciste, pédagogie, décolonial, post-décolonial, néolibéralisme

Introduction[1]

In the last decade the UK (United Kingdom) Higher Education (HE) sector has witnessed the emergence of a 'decolonial moment'. This moment saw the emergence of local yet connected movements across the UK, that followed in the footsteps of students and scholars in Africa, Latin America, the US, the Caribbean and Asia. In the UK, this moment began when students at the University of Oxford called for the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes at Oriel College, as well as a broader consideration of the university's colonial history and epistemological foundations, in their "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign, building upon the same-named movement in South Africa. This was followed swiftly by calls across the UK for a number of universities to "Decolonise Now" (Doharty et al., 2021). This moment traces its origins to international decolonising movements, but its historical context within UK HE has thus far been largely overlooked. UK universities have long domestic histories of student and scholar-led movements focused on critically assessing and addressing inequities. This article explores this historical trajectory in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the UK's 'decolonial moment', rooted in the context of radical education in UK universities. Thus, the article adds to the work of Gabriele Dietze (2014) by examining the utility of the decolonial project within the 'coloniser' setting. It questions how far decolonial projects can go in the former imperial centre. This is particularly significant for scholars of colour as well as those developing radical pedagogies. As Eddie Chambers (2023) argues, the UK's decolonial moment is temporally contingent, but its principles are shared with historical movements for more equitable pedagogic approaches as well as contemporary antiracist pedagogies.

This article presents a timeline focused on key case studies within this history: the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham, the Open University (OU), the

[1] In this article I capitalise Black but do not capitalise white. In both cases the convention is debated. I follow Kimberlé Crenshaw, who sees Black as a proper noun, which therefore requires capitalisation (e.g., Black is beautiful). I see white, on the other hand, as an adjective that describes cultures, politics and peoples (e.g., white supremacy).

'decolonial moment', and the Free Black University. Though I begin with CCCS, it must be noted that the centre's pedagogical approaches were also the product of a longer history of its scholars having developed adult education programmes grounded in the radical practice of worker education. In the 1960s, learning was seen as an integral part of the process of social change by scholars such as E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, who sought to work beyond the confines of HE through their development and teaching of adult education programmes (Coté et al., 2007). CCCS directors Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall both also had backgrounds in adult education prior to their roles at CCCS. As a result, the centre was rooted in its directors' understanding of the interconnected struggles of the white working class and racialised communities in Britain. CCCS is an important case study as its pedagogical approach drew from both anticolonial and Marxist ideas. The scholarship produced by the centre is seen as the origin of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the UK, and I argue CCCS was also a pioneer of antiracist pedagogies in UK HE.

The article thus contributes novel perspectives to histories of pedagogies in UK universities as the historical scholarship focused on CCCS has not yet connected this history with newer efforts to decolonise or address inherent biases such as racism within UK HE. I then explore the pedagogy of the OU as a successor to CCCS through Hall's move from CCCS to the OU. The paper next provides an overview of the 'decolonial moment' in UK HE, following the increasing traction of recent 'decolonising' movements, particularly in the wake of the resurgence of Black Lives Matter UK in the summer of 2020, before exploring a more contemporary example of groundbreaking antiracist pedagogical work: the Free Black University. The case study is significant because the movement is novel in many ways, yet it also demonstrates the connected history of radical pedagogies in the UK, as it shares key elements with CCCS and other radical approaches. By placing the decolonial moment in historical perspective, the paper argues that we are currently in a 'post-decolonial' phase, yet this is part of a longer history of antiracist pedagogy in UK HE, and the legacies of this continue to be called upon for continuing antiracist pedagogical work today.

This paper is written in the early stages of a new project that will ultimately include original oral history interviews and extensive archival research. For now, as I am engaging with existing scholarship, the paper is somewhat limited in its scope, with an implicit focus on fields within Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities. As the project develops, I will address this limitation by focusing on other fields, such as fields within STEM,[2] through my recruitment of oral history participants. The methods employed in this paper are historical. I engage with disconnected scholarship of radical pedagogical movements in order to weave together a connected history. I also engage with primary source material including existing oral history interviews. Altogether, this approach allows us to develop a broader picture of successful strategies for the development of radical pedagogies, in order to create a vision for the future of HE in the UK and beyond.

Neoliberalism and anti-Blackness

[2] Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

An important theme that emerged while conducting the research presented in this article is the role of neoliberalism in limiting pedagogical advancements, and its relationship with anti-Blackness in UK universities. While decolonial and antiracist pedagogical approaches are connected with class struggle and have implications for teachers and learners across ethnicities, it must be noted that Black scholars and students – those with African or African Caribbean diasporic origins or heritage – are most impacted by racism and the congruent effects of neoliberalism within UK universities (and the UK more broadly). Reactions to the neoliberal world order, the neoliberalisation of HE, and experiences of oppression within that framework have all contributed to the development of strategies of resistance, including the development of radical pedagogies (Coté et al., 2007). At the same time, as Brittany Jones and Joel Berends (2023) demonstrate, "educational policies that *disadvantage* the Black body are not a new phenomenon, but are intentional and embedded" (p. 435, emphasis mine). Anti-Blackness is embedded within the educational structure of UK HEIs. Jones and Berends relate this to a broader history of "exclusions and tensions (…) [when] Black people have tried to obtain formal education" (p. 436). This broader history includes the ways in which Black students are marginalised through secondary schooling in the UK, which has been well documented by scholars such as Hannah Francis (2023) and Heidi Safia Mirza and Diane Reay (1997, 2000). As Francis and Reay and Mirza have shown, Black communities have sought to resist marginalisation through the Supplementary School Movement, the Black Education Movement and the Black Parents' Movement. These important histories are beyond the scope of this paper but are crucial to understanding the broader foundations of equitable pedagogies in the UK.

Today, the educational oppression of Black students is understood to be a result of the white supremacy that underpins Western Anglophone society. In the UK university, as Ayaka Yoshimizu (2023, p. 227) argues, "whiteness persists as an assumed identity for the ideal student body". This is the case despite the diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds of students, including the large percentage of international students enrolled in UK HEIs. Indeed, I suggest that the increased numbers of racialised international students are reflective of the increased neoliberalism of UK HEIs and their focus on students as a source of profit, as opposed to any shift in the foundational whiteness and coloniality of these universities. Thus, neoliberalism connects societal and institutional racism with the commodification of education, a result of contemporary, late-stage capitalism. Although the material, colonial foundations of certain UK universities are more overtly evident, such as the University of Bristol or Imperial College London, whose connections to empire are clear at the surface level, the undercurrent normativity of whiteness extends throughout various types of institution, from ancient universities, such as the University of Oxford, to those founded in the 1960s, such as the University of East Anglia, and so-called post-92s, such as the University of Hertfordshire.

UK HEIs have co-opted the language of decolonisation and have sought to address staff and student concerns through liberal/ neoliberal initiatives that do not address the colonial roots of inequities in these institutions. As Charisse Burden-Stelly (2019, p. 84) argues, "engagement with global political economy (…) is essential to decolonial praxis". The correlation between neoliberal practices and decolonial initiatives undertaken by UK universities is significant. This article thus develops Burden-Stelly's notion that Black

studies lost their radical potential through being managed by 'Westernised' universities in the United States. As Luke Reinke, Erin Miller and Tehia Glass (2021) argue, "it is possible to engage with [the work of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous scholars] and not overtly centralise the dismantling of structural racism". Thus, universities can co-opt languages of decolonisation and radical change and praise amendments to course reading lists without making significant organisational or epistemological changes. Reinke et al. suggest that specifically antiracist pedagogies are the solution to this, as these necessitate "teaching strategies that consider the role of racialised power, privilege and oppression, both in terms of analysing society, as well as critically reflecting on one's own position within it" (p. 3). How does this differ from decolonising initiatives, if at all? I suggest that if a decolonial approach to teaching and learning is one which questions the coloniality of university curricula, particularly in reference to the epistemological hierarchies present within these institutions, then an antiracist approach takes this into account alongside the contemporary and historical racisms that universities have upheld and developed. In seeking to move towards a more equitable pedagogical approach, educators must employ the traditions of Black and subaltern studies that have been developed outside of Western contexts with a critical lens. A case study presented by Kristopher Lotier, Xiomara Perez, Aidan Pierre and Prameet Shah (2023) provides evidence for the radical potential of reflecting on one's own privileged position within the neoliberal, anti-Black university when developing antiracist teaching methods. Importantly, as Jones and Berends (2023, p. 445) argue, "to be antiracist is more than just merely being aware of the white supremacy that persists (…) [it] is to speak up and speak out… to propose pedagogical enactments to make it better". In recent years, there has also been increasing momentum behind far-right movements in the UK, underpinned by an overall shift to the right in mainstream politics, with increased (but certainly not new) racism, xenophobia and anti-immigration discourse. This has only served to exacerbate the difficulties faced by Black and other racially minoritised people in Britain, both within and outside of universities. The neoliberal university serves as a backdrop to both the decolonial moment and the rising far right, doing very little to intervene in the latter while claiming to take the former seriously.

The radical pedagogies of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and the Open University (OU)

There is a long history of radical pedagogies in UK universities. The field of cultural studies, which emerged in the 1960s, has a particularly strong record of developing 'bottom-up' pedagogies and connecting these with 'oppositional social movements' as Mark Coté, Richard Day and Greig De Peuter (2007) demonstrate in their edited volume, *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments Against Neoliberal Globalization*. In 1964, the CCCS was founded by Richard Hoggart at the University of Birmingham as a key site for the development of the field and approach of cultural studies in the UK (Connell & Hilton, 2015). Though based at the university, the centre was initially funded by Penguin Books as a result of Hoggart's relationship with Penguin's founder. One of the most important radical features of the pedagogy at the CCCS was the strong focus on the development of critical thinking skills and the application of these skills to the wider world of information: books, the press,

and other reading materials, film, television, and the university itself (De Peuter, 2007). This focus was at the centre of the CCCS's antiracist pedagogical approach. By facilitating students' development of critical thinking skills and drawing attention to intersecting modes of oppression, CCCS sought to provide students with the tools necessary to dismantle racial and social hierarchies throughout society.

To begin with, the centre had a small student membership and few members of staff. Stuart Hall, who succeeded Hoggart as the director of CCCS, had been appointed as a Research Fellow of the centre from the outset. He, Hoggart and Michael Green (who was based between CCCS and the English Department at the University of Birmingham) were the only academic staff at the centre in 1964, alongside a secretary and six students. By the mid-1970s, there were over 50 students, the centre had started its MA programme, and the University of Birmingham had begun to contribute funding to the centre. According to Connell and Hilton (2015), students had a big influence at the centre because there were not many members of staff (four by the mid-1970s), and because Hoggart and Hall, through their former experiences of adult education, both had an interest in 'democratic' pedagogical approaches. This included developing and maintaining connections with educators in adult education, further education, secondary schools and teacher training centres (Gray, 2003). Though the centre itself was small, CCCS also contributed to undergraduate teaching at the University of Birmingham. In 1968 the centre began offering an introduction to contemporary cultural studies for English undergraduate students. In 1976, CCCS offered a course open to all students, "Classes, Cultures and Subcultures: Britain in the 1960s and 1970s", to which 300 students registered. The centre also gave lectures to students in Education (Gray, 2003). Through all of this, CCCS was able to offer a pedagogy that empowered students to understand their position within the university and what that meant in relation to wider society.

Scholars at CCCS actively sought to develop pedagogical praxes, seeing pedagogy as a cultural form subject to study and analysis. Teaching at CCCS was an "active and reflexive process" (Gray, 2003, p. 771). Teaching through seminars rather than lectures has been a central feature of CCCS's pedagogy since its inception. This was radical because it made the teaching more accessible, more discursive and thus more equitable. To hand over agency and authority to students was, I argue, a radical approach. In practice, according to Connell and Hilton (2015), one of Hall's first actions as centre director was to "obtain funds to purchase a second reprographic (…) machine to be used by the students" (p. 297) so that they could reproduce materials without having to ask permission. Students sat on admissions panels for new prospective students. A hardship fund was set up, taking a voluntary levy from salaried staff and students to help fee-paying students and those with other financial burdens This created a collectivist atmosphere among centre members.

There were, however, important drawbacks to the approach taken by CCCS and tensions arose for the scholars who sought to develop radical pedagogies (Coté et al., 2007). The centre had a fraught relationship with the white and elitist University of Birmingham, of which CCCS was at the margins (Webster, 2004). Student life at the centre was burdened with the weight of collaborative work and activism. The centre had a 'notoriously poor record on thesis completion' because students were so embedded in the collective research culture and activism. Though students felt enriched by these experiences at times, there were also

tensions among staff and students on the basis of differences in political opinions. Another challenge to established forms of pedagogy was CCCS's approach to postgraduate supervisions. Seminar teaching was abandoned in favour of a 'sub-group' model in which staff and students worked collectively and collaboratively, blurring the boundaries between staff and students (Connell & Hilton, 2015).

Hall is held in high esteem as a leading figure in the development of radical pedagogies in the UK, not only in his role at CCCS in the 1960s and 1970s but also in his work at the Open University (OU) in the 1980s and 1990s (De Peuter, 2007). Indeed, the scholars this article draws from, De Peuter and Connell and Hilton (2015), all present Hall's approaches to teaching as hugely influential and radical. Hall's testimony reveals his commitment to radical pedagogies was an embodiment of his "utopian hope that to know more is really to understand more" (De Peuter, 2007, p. 117). Yet, for Hall, the lack of hierarchy within the centre led to a lack of boundaries. The blurred lines between seeing teachers as peers and people students wanted to have personal relationships with were difficult for Hall to mediate. He left CCCS for the OU in 1979. Following this, through the eras of Thatcherism and Blairism, CCCS staff faced the pressures of neoliberalism that HEIs across the UK also faced. In an interview with Greig De Peuter (2007), Hall stated,

> Every academic (…) must produce the requisite number of research papers. Everybody now has an administrative task: in monitoring, in admissions, and so on. The more junior you are, the more likely it is that you will be loaded up with administrative tasks. This means there is a squeeze on the time of every academic. Research assessment also places tremendous pressure on the standardization of thought and of academic programs. (p. 109)

These barriers to delivering radical education in UK universities, reported on in 2007, remain at the forefront in 2025. Hall also noted that positive disruptions to the elitism of universities, through the successful broadening of student numbers from previously underrepresented backgrounds, has been tarnished by the fact that,

> there has been no investment so academics are teaching twice the number of students in the same amount of time. This pressure of numbers has a massive impact on people's careers, on time, on the (…) nature of teaching, on the nature of the disciplines, on how much students are getting from their degrees, and on the diversity of programs… (De Peuter, 2007, pp. 109–110)

This testimony resonates with more recent workload struggles for academics across the globe, which – in the UK – were brought to a head through the Four Fights dispute between the University and College Union (UCU) and UK university management in 2018, and were never brought to a satisfactory conclusion. In the UK context, the ever-increasing workloads are reflective of the continued neoliberalisation of universities, specifically the focus on profit above the quality of education. Mirroring the present moment, at which time universities are also co-opting languages of decoloniality in order to improve their brand identities, the University of Birmingham began to take ownership of CCCS 'as a brand' in the 1990s. This was done with the explicit intent of recruiting international students to provide the university with revenue (Gray, 2003). Throughout the 1990s, across the UK, student numbers in HE expanded, while staff-student ratios and staff pay worsened. When CCCS was co-opted by the University of Birmingham in the 1990s, it

became the Department of Cultural Studies. This department was then unceremoniously closed by the university without consultation of its staff in 2002 demonstrating the appropriative nature of the relationship between the centre's academics and the University of Birmingham (Webster, 2004).

At the OU, the pedagogical challenges were specific to the students that the university sought to recruit and teach. Hall described the OU project as

> a distance-education university that was available to adults, people over twenty-one, who had not had the opportunity to go to university, who were not traditional students, and thus who would not have a traditional academic background but that would still allow them, over a longer period, to get a degree while they were working or bringing up families. Taking one course a year, students could get a first-class degree at the end of eight years. (De Peuter, 2007, p. 115)

Hence, the OU was radical in its focus on developing university-style education for students from non-traditional and under-represented backgrounds, as opposed to adult education being something distinct from university degrees. The benefits of this approach are certainly contested, but when Hall moved from CCCS to the OU in 1979, he saw this institution as a potential site for radical teaching and learning, in a different way than CCCS. He said,

> the challenge for me was how to translate these ideas so that they were not only germane to middle-class or upper-middle-class professional students (…) For the ideas to pass, you had to build in the skills of learning into the courses: how to write an essay, how to read a book, how to take notes, how to listen to a lecture, and how to come out with something at the end. Pedagogy was a built-in part of any course. [OU] academics were involved in producing courses, readers, and radio and television programs. I had to learn the traditions of distance education. (De Peuter, 2007, p. 115)

These notions of 'building-in' skills development into course content are central not only to radical pedagogical approaches but can, in fact, be seen reflected in many university curricula in the UK today. The ideas central to the OU at the end of the 1970s, to teach students how to read, write and think critically, have been translated into best practice pedagogy in UK universities in the present. Hall's reflection on 'learning' distance education is also important to note, as this element of OU pedagogy was a crucial factor in making its HE accessible to different types of students. The OU model might have been a useful reference point for other universities in more recent times, during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, at which time traditional universities had to rapidly develop their distance learning techniques. This moment presented an opportunity for radical democratisation of HE, which was largely missed. Instead, the traditional and elitist academic mode of lecture-seminar delivery (without focus on learner-centred pedagogies designed to meet learners where they are) simply took on a virtual form.

The decolonial moment and after: 'decolonise' in context and the Free Black University

Are we currently in a 'post-decolonial' moment as a result of the recent waning and synchronous co-opting of movements to decolonise UK universities and their lexicons? As Nadena Doharty, Manuel Madriaga and Remi Joseph-Salisbury (2021) demonstrate, the UK's decolonial moment was rooted in antiracist student

activism, as well as the "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign at the University of Oxford and the multi-campus campaign, "Why is my curriculum white?". In Rhodes Must Fall's 2018 publication, the movement is described as

> a protest movement that began on 9 March 2015, originally directed against a statue of British imperialist Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. The campaign for the statue's removal received global attention and led to a wider movement to decolonise education, by inspiring the emergence of allied student movements at other universities across the world. (Chantiluke et al., 2018, p. 2)

While this included the campaign to remove the statue of Rhodes at the University of Oxford, its roots lie in a longer-standing history of student grievances in Oxford and at the University of Cape Town (UCT). At UCT, unlike in Oxford, the campaign to remove the statue of Rhodes was successful. However, this was only one of many aims of the students at UCT and in the wave of statue-defacements that followed across South Africa. Other problematised statues were largely *not* removed (Marschall, 2017), and, at UCT, the core student issues centred on race and affirmative action in admissions policies were not addressed by the university's administration (Mangcu, 2017). These emerging campaigns shared the radical vision of a more equitable university symbolised (in part) by the removal of statues, but not limited to this. Instead, the enduring presence of coloniality and white supremacy, represented by statues of Rhodes, was the focus of both Rhodes Must Fall campaigns. As Doharty et al. (2021) write,

> In each of these campaigns, students have been clear to point to the institutional and structural issues facing UK Higher Education, and much of this has come to coalesce in a movement to 'decolonize' Higher Education (…) This movement draws upon the languages and frameworks (sometimes) of the revolutionary struggles against colonial rule that characterised the 1960s, and led to the formal independence of many nations in the Global South. When applied to contemporary educational contexts, (at its essence, at least) decoloniality urges us to consider the ways in which colonialism has shaped, and how coloniality continues to shape, knowledge production and education systems. (p. 234)

The decolonial moment thus had the potential to "engender a radical framework for examining and transforming the colonial relations that shape education" – a framework that would dismantle the coloniality of UK universities – but instead has been co-opted by HEIs and thus risks "becoming little more than a superficial buzzword, severed from its radical essence" (Doharty et al., 2021, p. 234). This is particularly prudent in the current moment, in which student encampments for Palestine have been met with disdain and (in some cases) violence from the institutions that have claimed to be 'decolonising' in recent years.

Abu Moghli and Kadiwal (2021) suggest that "efforts to decolonise the curriculum by tinkering with reading lists, adding Black and brown scholars, and opening the space for discussions of diversity without radical engagement with pedagogy… are perhaps strategic" (pp. 8–9) as they allow UK HEI's to add to the existing western epistemological model that universities are built upon rather than changing this model and dismantling elitism, colonialism and white supremacy. Doharty et al. (2021) connect this to the enduring presence of white supremacy, arguing that

> Whiteness in British HE is marred by a unique affliction: cut off from colonial and postcolonial roots, decolonization is the 'new' way in which institutions can demonstrate commitment to racism - both

> interpersonally and structurally. Institutions advance rather than dismantle racism by adopting the work of a few racially minoritised groups, but exploitatively draining the useful parts of their scholarship to meet institutional metrics and marketise fashionable buzz-words that appeal to social media hashtags. (p. 241)

This correlates with the ever-increasing neoliberalisation of the UK university, in which individualised academic/ scholar 'brands' and university 'brand image' are considered above student wellbeing and the production of knowledge (beyond the existing, colonial, epistemological frameworks that are already entrenched). The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in 2020 also played an important role in the decolonial moment. On the one hand, BLM was a turning point for many white scholars who had not previously realised the extent of their role in maintaining the *status quo* and, at the same time, their power to do something to address racism within their local contexts (Lotier et al., 2023). On the other hand, BLM was superficially engaged with and co-opted by many UK HEIs in order to promote their brands as equitable without doing the necessary antiracist work.

The radical decolonial work that *is* being done identifies

> alternative literature and highlight[s] the importance of knowledge(s) produced by academics of colour, and feminists from the Global South. These efforts include acknowledging the importance of alternative resources such as artistic expressions, which are increasingly considered valid sources of knowledge to be referenced within academic work. (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021, p. 1)

Collaborative approaches between teachers and learners are essential for dismantling colonial hierarchies (Rajendram, 2022). Xine Yao (2018), for example, has expertly reflected on her teaching experiences in a 2018 article on teaching digital humanities with an antiracist lens. A core, practical principle Yao centred in her approach was to use the first class of the module to focus on developing students' sense of their own positionality within the university before turning to other objects of analysis in the following weeks. This allowed students to understand the context in which they were learning, enabling them to think critically about their other modules and to approach their learning safely. This is a method for empowering students and putting into practice the notion of dismantling classroom hierarchies and developing teaching as a form of facilitating learning, one which can be adapted based on classroom size, time available with students, and student backgrounds. Yao also reflects on the need for material support, which is not often something teachers can influence – but we can attempt to make our reading and other course materials free and easy to access, as well as make assessments financially accessible to all students. However, the variety of levels of autonomy university educators have over their own courses means this is not always achievable in a complete way.

Doharty et al. (2021) suggest that increased representation of Black scholars and scholars of colour is another way to address the colonial and racist pedagogies rife within UK universities. They do not draw a clear line between decolonial and antiracist approaches and argue that "a decolonial lens draws our attention to the whiteness of the university staff body" (p. 234), implying an important inherent connectedness between legacies of colonialism in UK universities and enduring racism. The tokenistic inclusion of Black scholars and other scholars of colour on reading lists can be mediated by hiring more

diverse staff, yet it is those staff who, according to Doharty et al., face a multitude of additional burdens compared to their white peers: higher levels of stress, mental and physical illness, experiences of racism and othering. Yet, posts created in response to decolonising movements have proven *not* to be a solution, not only because this places all of the burden of 'decolonising' and addressing institutional inequities on scholars of colour, but also, as Chambers (2023) notes, because these job opportunities entrench the otherness of scholars of colour. Systemic change, which has been demanded by various movements across history, requires more than diversity hires. Universities have to radically change the way they operate. Mirroring the words of Hall, Arun Verma (2022) argues that the lack of support for teaching staff – in terms of time and money – is a key inhibitor of the development of antiracist pedagogies, particularly as Black and other staff of colour are often left with the bulk of the burden of this work without suitable compensation but also without really being given adequate time to develop better courses and pedagogical approaches.

To contextualise this, while the decolonial moment was emerging, another branch of antiracist pedagogies was being developed. In 2016 the UK's first degree in Black Studies was created by Kehinde Andrews at Birmingham City University. According to its online prospectus for the academic year 2024/25, the BA in Black Studies draws from the long-standing tradition of Black Studies in the US and brings together various strands of British scholarship that have been in existence across the UK but never labelled as Black Studies (such as areas within sociology, cultural studies, history, politics, development). This pedagogy is focused on student empowerment and employability, with a built-in internship in any field of work that they wish to pursue after their studies. The course aims to be more accessible to Black students from working-class or lower-income backgrounds compared to other traditional humanities and social science undergraduate degree courses. This, I argue, gives the course radical potential to create a transformative space within UK HE, reflective of CCCS's foundations in adult and worker education, directly dealing with anti-Black racism and enabling Black students to learn in a safe and empowering space while also developing their career ambitions for the future. At the same time, the focus on employability mirrors the broader neoliberal shift of UK HE.

All this pedagogical work, which ultimately seeks to make HE more equitable, is being done within the context of the decolonial moment having been co-opted by institutions. UK HEIs have created policies that claim to address their institutional coloniality but, in practice, do little more than what Reinke et al. (2021, p. 1) describe as "grit narratives… that attend to the comfort of whites, rather than radical reform". In particular, they argue that "one-shot mandatory (or voluntary) professional development workshops with little follow-up supporting faculty in rethinking their practices are futile attempts at antiracism" (p. 2). Most UK universities are yet to meaningfully address the concerns of this moment. By tracing the historical trajectory of radical pedagogies in the UK, this article has shown that each period has had distinct issues to grapple with as well as some consistent through-lines. Today, as Hall pointed out in his experiences with the OU, we must recognise the deeply entrenched biases in the education system before students arrive at university if we are to address inequities within UK HE. Students who have been trained on how to read and write in a certain way through private education have an advantage over the brightest students who

have been to state schools, as it remains the case that the privately educated arrive at university with the skills required to pass classes with high marks "with relatively little effort" (Lotier et al., 2023, p. 217).

Lotier et al. (2023) present a potential solution to this in-built bias, akin to the pedagogy of Andrews. To make adjustments for the additional labour that students must undertake if they have not been trained for university education from a young age, particularly if they have to work alongside their course to support themselves and their families, university educators could "let students decide (…) how hard they would have to work" (p. 217). This is not to suggest that students who have been privately educated before entering HE in the UK attain higher grades than those who have attended state schools, but instead recognise the labour of 'catching up' with those who have been rigorously prepared for HE throughout their schooling. In the case study presented by Lotier et al. this adjustment took the form of students being graded on the quality of their work rather than the quantity of hours put into the task. More broadly, this could take the shape of a more fluid approach to marking and assessment, devised in conversation with individual groups of students, who will each have unique needs and backgrounds. Another important point for making marking and assessment more equitable, as Ayaka Yoshimizu (2023) argues, is to consider the weight of the risk students take when they approach assessments by incorporating their lived experiences and rewarding these studies accordingly.

A radical approach to pedagogy can include the teacher holding the assumption that they are not always the expert when it comes to the ways in which the learning material applies to the lived experiences of students, so fluidity in approach is essential for dismantling hierarchies of power/ oppression (Yoshimizu, 2023). This finding relates to the approach taken by CCCS in the mid-1960s, and thus a closer analysis of the benefits and constraints of the centre's approach may be beneficial for contemporary scholars seeking to dismantle these hierarchies today. Relatedly, when looking at Black and PoC student experiences, educators must focus on positive studies as well as dealing with the reality of histories of racism and colonial violence. This may be something that educators who are not racialised overlook. Elizabeth Spaulding et al. (2021) suggest that for Black students specifically, productive examples of antiracist pedagogies "see Black brilliance and [centre] healing, healthy relationships, histories and herstories that exhume and affirm Black joy" (p. 9). Yet, as Nathan Blom (2024) points out, there are tensions between doing radical, antiracist teaching and what is best for student employability after university. Effective pedagogies take into consideration and implement what students want and need from their studies, as Andrews' Black Studies course has aimed to do. If students are looking for employability over self-empowerment, this has to be taken seriously, particularly in recent years, when students have to deal with fees and other increasing financial burdens. This reiterates the importance of educators viewing themselves as non-experts, and in practice can be achieved through simply sharing the setting of course aims and goals with students.

The most contemporary case study in this article, the Free Black University,[3] is an important example of a radical, antiracist pedagogic approach that mirrors elements of CCCS while also addressing the anti-

[3] https://www.freeblackuni.com/

Blackness and neoliberalism of contemporary UK universities. The Free Black University began with a fundraising phase in 2020 and led its first courses, with 22 students, in 2022/23. These courses are described as Radical Imagination Labs and led to the creation of a collaborative journal and Audio-Visual compilation. The Free Black University movement describes itself as "born out of the intention to create a radical, anti-colonial and queer space in which we can reimagine higher education". It was founded by Melz Owusu, a doctoral researcher at the University of Cambridge, in order to combat the trauma experienced by Black students in traditional university systems in the UK. The Free Black University was thus created by Black scholar/ students for Black students, with the aim of creating a space in which students could envision a radical future. Pedagogy is at the core of this movement. Drawing from the scholarship of bell hooks, the Free Black University outlines four key pedagogical principles: Imagination – a focus on the power of the inner child and utopian dreaming; Alternative ways of knowing – valuing a wealth of different epistemologies as opposed to just those formed within ivory towers; Breaking the student-teacher dichotomy – this draws from the principles of the CCCS, allowing Free Black University teachers to facilitate learning and co-create knowledge rather than being the final word on specialisms; and finally, Healing. In Owusu's (n.d.) own words, they

> founded the Free Black Uni because I resolutely believe in the power and possibility of education as a tool of healing and liberation. Theory has healed me time and time again, and I believe it has the possibility to heal so much of the broken-heartedness and pain each of us encounter. For me, theory is the process of giving language to the knowledges which may have become knotted-up within us and that which we may try and push down and hide because if we allowed it to escape into the light, we would be confronted by a world that denies our truth. In giving our truths language and having that truth witnessed by others – healing and freedom becomes more possible. That is the final principle our pedagogy rests on – there is no freedom without healing. (n.p.)

This final principle is particularly significant in its focus on student needs and experiences, and most clearly highlights the Free Black University's unique position as a radical alternative to established, fee-paying HEIs in the UK. An important note is that the Free Black University was an independent project pursued by Owusu while the Black Studies courses delivered by Andrews were funded by Birmingham City University. While this independence allowed for truly radical approaches to pedagogy, it has also meant a huge burden in terms of workload and, as a result, the future of this movement is unclear.

Conclusions

This article has demonstrated that movements to decolonise the university in the UK exist within a longer historical context of scholars and students pursuing radical, democratic and antiracist pedagogies in UK HEIs. From the pedagogies of CCCS to the OU, there have been many examples of radical pedagogies developed and implemented in UK universities since the 1960s. Even as various decolonising movements emerged, in what this article periodises as the 'decolonial moment', there were synchronous antiracist movements, namely Andrews' development of a Black Studies programme. These histories are not only significant for scholars seeking to develop their own radical pedagogical praxes but also add nuance to our intellectual

understanding of the decolonial moment in the former colonial epicentre. As the UK university has transformed into a neoliberal institution, there is an urgent need to combat both neoliberalism and anti-Blackness within these spaces. For scholars seeking to develop more equitable approaches to learning and teaching, the decolonial approach has yielded some positive outcomes, but this perspective alone is limited unless we also draw from broader histories of radical pedagogies, as the Free Black University has done, in order to envision a transformed university for the future.

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