

## **A curriculum to think with: British colonialism, corporate kleptocracy, enduring white privilege and locating mechanisms for change**

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### **Abstract**

*Each country should look beyond the nationalistic stories and the everyday self-images popularly disseminated. UK students deserve an environment where school curricula, public debate, politics, media and memorials give balanced, factual and ethically informed narratives about Britain's past and current dealings with other races and nations. A mythical 'great' Britain underpins a 'racialized consciousness' shaping attitudes to race equality issues at home today and how of contemporary commercial colonialism is evaluated. 'White' is a socially constructed composite ethnicity with exclusionary and subjugating characteristics. With different national roots, and played out differently in different countries, the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests point to common, enduring global inequalities and injustices with 'white priority' at their root. This paper focuses principally on the school curriculum, its content and, how it is experienced and assessed. It examines understanding of, and attitudes towards, five interlocking themes: slavery; colonialism; 'righteous' wars; contemporary exploitative engagement with lesser developed nations; and racial and class inequalities in today's Britain. The limited current state of understanding of these issues poses challenges to the extension of multicultural education into meaningful antiracism and action for social justice. The school curriculum is only one part of wider action required to address (mis)understandings of Britain's*

*past and present colonialism, to recognise current race related injustices at home and abroad and to resituate notions of 'belonging', ethnicity and equal worth.*

*Even 'correcting' these perceptions, bolstered by the widespread 'Black Lives Matter' protests in many countries, will not lead to sustained improvements in racial justice without significant adjustments to legal, social and especially economic infrastructures.*

**Keywords:** *racism/antiracism, slavery, colonialism, school curriculum design, white privilege.*

### **What's the problem?**

National histories are constructed stories about one's country and its people: heroes, wars, adventure, discoveries and colonies. Today, the UK is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society in a globalised context, and, not for this reason alone, citizens need to recognise its internationalist past, much of which is unpalatable. History provides an understanding for inhabitants of their roots, accessed through the school curriculum, television documentaries, history degrees, reading or chats in pubs, often selective, serve elite interests and overlook or trivialise uncomfortable evidence.

Subject areas such as geography and literature studies should explicitly involve examination of messages conveying white superiority and associated denigration of other ethnicities. A curriculum to think about and to think with must consider a globalised, interconnected world, where the majoritarian is not white, where private issues are dissociated from systemic contexts and neo-colonialism exerts increasing influence.

Britain's role in the world is presented as glorious, filled with heroes: Henry V (Agincourt), Clive (India), Rhodes (Rhodesia), Wellington (Waterloo), Nelson (Trafalgar), would-be heroes Lords Raglan and Cardigan (Crimea, Charge of the Light Brigade debacle). The first world war gave rise to remembrance of 'the glorious dead', invariably white. The second world war provided political and military heroes like Churchill and Montgomery and dominant images of Britain standing bravely alone, strong, bold, inventive, white and magnanimous supported by national songs like the Anthem, the British Grenadiers, Land of Hope and Glory and poetry including Tennyson's Light Brigade, Kipling's Gunga Din and many Shakespeare plays. The British empire is seldom seen as land on which 'the blood never dried', as expressed in Newsinger's book of that title (2013).

The British National Anthem, strong in nationalistic sentiments, calls on God to help the nation, 'Scatter her enemies, And make them fall; Confound their politics [and best of all] Frustrate their knavish tricks'. Elgar's quintessentially English *Land and Hope and Glory* calls for the bounds of the empire to be set '*wider still and wider*', and, 'God who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet'. Britain is portrayed as upstanding, Christian, mostly male, almost exclusively white, exuding benevolence wherever it went, with God unquestionably on its side.

The *problem* is addressed in this paper through five inter-related themes of British history and contemporary affairs: slavery; colonialism; 'righteous' wars; contemporary exploitative engagement with lesser developed nations; and racial and class inequalities in today's Britain. The first three have an embeddedness in the national psyche, which permits the fourth and underpins racialised white privilege.

Three over-arching claims should be made at the outset: firstly, other accounts of world history can at least give an alternative perspective to Britain's nationalistic sense, as in Frankopan's (2016) *The Silk Roads*, which shows complex civilisations existing way before Britain became 'civilised'; secondly, most countries sanitise their past and their participation in enslaving people, colonising lands and military atrocities; thirdly, follow the money; the great explorers – Columbus, da Gama, Cook etc - were not in it solely for the glory but were funded to get rich individually, corporately and nationally and this motive, even if disguised, is paramount today. Racism and inequality are essentially capitalist, economic issues. Enduring racism can only in part be explained by poor racial literacy and, across the economically advanced world to different degrees, one must recognise 'white rage' and 'antiblackness' (Blaisdell, 2020). These related notions are given force by selective histories and nationalist sentiments.

Addressing these injustices which arise can be given prominence and elicit widespread public support, but will be insufficient without response from political and economic systems with redistributive policies and legislative requirements. Indeed, 'performative sympathy' (Miller, 2020) or 'performative allyship' (Phillips, 2020) can weaken the drive for change.

## **Slavery**

The campaigner, William Wilberforce, is celebrated for his part in legislation to ban the slave trade across the British empire, achieved in 1807. The Abolition of Slavery Act came later and applied to the colonies from 1834, when over 3,000 slave owning families in the UK were 'compensated, and it was another 34 years before 1868 slavery ceased in the United States. Almost 200 years of trading in human beings transporting over 3,000,000 Africans across the Atlantic, and Winston Churchill in his monumental *History of the English-*

*speaking Peoples* writes, 'the abolition of the slave trade, a measure which ranks among the greatest of British achievements' (Volume 2, p. 252) later reflecting that, 'slaves had a subjugated life which, though odious to Christian civilisation, was physically less harsh than African barbarism' (Volume 4, p. 120), with no reference to the barbarity of the industrialised commodification of fellow humans. The two centuries of British slave trading and the resulting economic benefits to this country should be explored in the school curriculum and beyond. Huge numbers of slaves were taken to Spanish, Portuguese and French plantations, with British companies at the forefront of managing, warehousing, transporting and delivering human cargo. The slave trade fuelled industrialisation in the British Isles, bringing in capital and goods from across the world. The London docks, and those of Liverpool, Bristol and Glasgow, testify to the volumes of material brought in at bargain prices and to the detriment of local populations in the colonies.

British accountancy and record keeping have provided archives listing all slave owners, numbers of slaves owned and the amount 'compensation Accessing the Legacies of British Slave-ownership database (UCL 2018), it is possible to track forward from some names in the 1830s to rich families in 2020. The compensation recipients were widely spread, included clergymen and widows, and 19 Parsons's are listed and many Hall's - Catherine Hall is Emerita Professor at University College London and Chair of the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-Ownership. The benefits, direct and indirect, personal and community-wide, are such as to make the nation complicit. As Hall and colleagues make plain, 'slave ownership is virtually invisible in British history, elided by strategies of euphemism and evasion originally adopted by the slave-owners themselves and subsequently reproduced widely in a British culture' (Hall et al, 2014, p. 1). 'Black and British' is more than simply a forgotten history (Olusoga, 2016). The indirect products of slavery are visible

in magnificent 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings of the country's cities, in the churches, hospitals, alms houses and in the establishment of charities such as The Lifeboat Institution funded by excess capital, philanthropy eclipsing the stain of the pitiless trade that enabled such generosity. The renovation of aristocratic piles and marrying into the cash-strapped gentry was the lot of the plantation-owning, triangular trade businessmen. Furthermore, 'It is impossible to imagine the reconfiguration [of Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century] taking the form it did, at the pace and direction it did, without colonial slavery and without the slave-owners who transmitted colonial slavery to the Metropole' (Hall et al, 2014, p. 252).

Britain's Industrial Revolution, ports, cities and canal system would have been impossible without the wealth generated from slave labour. The capitalist banking system evolved to distribute the incoming wealth to profit-making enterprises, the development of industry and even into the army and navy (via taxes) to protect and further the country's imperial interests. Banking became a huge enterprise in Britain to redistribute (launder?) the incoming wealth out to myriad infrastructure works and industrial production.

Terms such as 'slaves', 'slave trade' and 'slavery' have an abstractness, detached from the human bodies involved, insulating citizens from empathy; 'enslaved people' brings the person back into focus. The school curriculum in England contains little on the cultures from which enslaved peoples came, their histories and art, too easily assumed by their blackness and unclothedness to be other than the majority white Europeans. But children do not learn about that. The 'othering' and dehumanization of the African (Barrett, 2017) and the erasure of black pain (Moore & Sullivan, 2018) continue through to the modern day. Slave graves in the Caribbean and the United States are unrecorded. Barrett's research into the war graves for Africans who served in the first world war reveals the disregard which the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission had/has for the thousands of Africans interred in untended

scrubland with no list of names and no memorial. Barrett writes of, 'The dehumanization of the African ... seen as ... closer to nature, and the animal kingdom, than are Europeans, and the African is a child not an adult human. The two discourses complement each other to deny full humanity' (Barrett, 2017, p. 240). David Lammy, MP, co-presenting the Channel 4 documentary, *Unremembered: Britain's Forgotten War Heroes* (10.10.19), at the war cemetery in Voi, Southern Kenya, and in disgust says, 'This is apartheid!' (Ramaswamy, 2019).

Today, it is more than vestiges of past wrongs, but the continuing demeaning of, and disregard for, African heritage and Asian immigrant families who may be several generations on from the original arrivals. Imposed economic and social inferiority persists.

### **Colonialisation**

Maritime imperial capitalism from the 1490s onwards set the pattern of expansion of control and the extraction of value and goods, including the trade in slaves. Imperial expansion, a morally questionable internationally competitive endeavour at which Britain excelled, and, for 300 years, was the top coloniser, fuelling pride in the extent of the Empire. Churchill echoed this public pride, stating: 'Nearly a hundred years of peace and progress had carried Britain to the leadership of the world [and] the dawn of the twentieth century seemed bright and calm for those who lived within the unequalled bounds of the British Empire, or sought shelter within its folds' (Churchill, 1956, Volume 4, p. 303). Other historians of later periods have sanctified the empire seeing Britain only as 'the mother of freedom' bringing benefits to all she encountered (Smith, 1987; Pugh, 1999).

Few at home asked then, or ask now, what the British were doing in Africa, India, South Asia and the West Indies - by what right British people entered a country and set about 'ruling'. Any uprisings or military setbacks were attributed to 'knaveish', dark-skinned people. The black hole of Calcutta (1756) was viewed as a crime against the British with no balancing account of Clive of the East India Company and his reprisals which resulted in a much larger death toll. Similarly, the Indian mutiny of 1857 - 'rebellion' as Indian authors would call it - was seen in Britain as an offence to righteous British rule. Its suppression was brutal, with hundreds blown to bits from cannons or hung from gibbets, with women and children also massacred in large numbers. After this event, the government of India was transferred from the East India Company to the Crown and, in 1877, Victoria became Empress of India with huge pageantry, power and the splendour of being part of the empire, utterly disregarding the pain of colonised subjects. At that moment, Victoria reigned over the most extensive empire in world history, which was still growing and, by 1909, covered 12.7 million square miles, around 25% of the world's land surface and controlled roughly 25% of the world's population, about 444 million people. The title Emperor of India was in use by subsequent monarchs until independence in 1947. The 'greatness of the British empire' was visually reinforced by school wall maps of the world dominated by red for imperial possessions. Britain's rule in India, having begun in a small way in 1650, was motivated by the prospect of commercial exploitation, initially by the East India Company, leading to the establishment of legal, military and trading functions.

Tharoor reports that, 'The British extracted from India approximately £18M each year between 1765 and 1815' (Tharoor, 2017, p. 9) and, 'By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, India was Britain's biggest source of revenue, the world's biggest purchaser of British exports and the source of highly paid employment for British civil servants and soldiers, all at India's own expense. Indians literally



paid for their own oppression' (p. 20). Ordinary British employees acquired huge fortunes and returned home to retire. At Dulwich College, a public school in south London, the honours boards show those who went to Oxbridge, to Sandhurst and to the Indian Civil Service (ICS). The ICS had 'status' and was one way of earning well and retiring early. In 1890 it is amazing that a few thousand British officials governed almost 300 million Indians (Hobsbawm, 1987, p. 81).

In other countries, those fighting for freedom against the British were seen as terrorists, ZANU in Rhodesia and Mau-Mau in Kenya (Edgerton, 1989) being examples. The atrocities by the British in Kenya are well documented by Elkins (2005). In 1902, Britain had just won the Boer war acquiring territory with huge mineral wealth and Cecil Rhodes bequeathed his wealth to the further extension of the 'bounds' of the empire, with a hit list of territories to acquire. Around this time, Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905, claimed that the empire was 'the greatest instrument for good the world has ever seen' (Tharoor, 2017, p. 214). Others talk of 'benign autocracy' and 'altruism', pretensions which Tharoor calls 'twaddle', but the latter is not the dominant message in today's Britain.

In addition to the extraction of huge wealth from India, 1,215,000 Indian soldiers were sent abroad in the first world war resulting in 101,500 casualties. India paid large amounts of money towards the war costs, essentially because India's government was made up of Englishmen accountable to the British government. Under the heading *the great war and the great betrayal*, Tharoor shows how the huge Indian support for the war effort met subsequently with a 'humiliating British recompense'. An even greater sacrifice was made in the second world war with the British Indian Army eventually numbering 2,500,000 and suffering over 87,000 deaths. The Indian contribution was partly

motivated to position themselves for eventual independence, for which Indians felt thwarted after the first world war.

Numerous atrocities can be laid at the door of British colonial policy and its implementation: the 1876-77 famine in India was made much worse because of the insistence that India's grain continue to be exported to global markets; it was said that, 'London was eating India's bread' (Tharoor, 2017, p. 155). At the same, taxes were raised, which the population could ill afford; deaths due to starvation were estimated at 3,500,000.

A more bloody example is Brigadier General Dyer's Jallianwala Bagh Gardens massacre in Amritsar of unarmed protesters in April 1919. One estimate is 1,499 deaths (Tharoor, p. 169). Though initially censured, Dyer was subsequently hailed a hero, a strong and resolute soldier, dubbed 'the man who saved India'. Kipling, writer of 'The White Man's Burden', led the collection which raised £26,000 for Dyer (Tharoor, 2017, p. 77). The Amritsar slaughter is scarcely known, yet the Peterloo massacre back home in Manchester (about 15 dead and 500 injured), exactly one hundred years earlier, is remembered, even if the circumstances of the protest and the cavalry's response are poorly understood.

The Bengal famine of 1943 resulted in 3,000,000 lives lost, nearly as bad as the 1876/7 famine, and when discussed in parliament in London was seen as just one of those Malthusian adjustments (Tharoor, 2017, p. 159). This was during the Second World War and food was exported from India to feed the troops at the front, allegedly already well-stocked, while Indians starved at home. The inaction on the part of the British was motivated both by financial considerations and a lesser worth attributed to brown-skinned people living far

away. Davis (2001) calls it 'colonial genocide'. But students do not learn about that.

Britain named roads at various points in history as monuments to the nation's global reach, heroes and accomplishments: Kimberley Crescent, Lagos Avenue, Kitchener or Clive Roads, or Crimea Terrace. Abroad, the British took it upon themselves to name geographical features: George Everest was for a long period Surveyor General of India. In 1865, the Royal Geographical Society named Peak XV', the world's highest mountain, 'Everest', despite Everest's protest that it could not be easily written or pronounced in Hindi.

Imperial action did not stop with the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and both the Falklands war of 1982 (Freedland, 1988) and the Iraq war of 2003 (Galbraith, 2006) can be interpreted as colonial enterprises, whether to retain control of an area to which British people had migrated or for access to oil. Despite public protest, greater for the Iraq war, there was widespread, latent approval in the UK for the exercise of military might, both prime ministers winning the next elections. At home, Britons could feel that same superiority that had lasted through the height of empire and two world wars enabling them to feel that the nation was still a player on the world stage. More recently. A YouGov poll revealed that 59% thought the British Empire 'something to be proud of' (YouGov, 2014). There is a need to rebalance what is taught and understood about British colonialism, indeed, colonialism generally as a calculated, rapacious, repressive, exploitative enterprise.

### **'Righteous' battles and wars**

Prior to the two world wars in which Britain is portrayed as victor, there were many military escapades. Britain was equipped well by various shipbuilding

sites and huge military estates like that of Royal Arsenal at Woolwich, London. Two engagements illustrate the British way of writing history.

A small and little known example concerns the East India Company, very much an agent of the state, had problems with Tulaji Angre, the master of Suvarnadrurg, a fortification off the west coast of India. The British saw him as a pirate because he attacked their ships, though he was the legitimate, ruler of the area. Tulaji felt entitled to attack any ship that did not have a pass of safe conduct issued by his men on payment of a toll. When he attempted to negotiate with the East India Company in 1754, he received the reply: 'Can you imagine that the English will ever submit to take passes of any Indian nation? We grant passes, but would take none from anybody'. William James with four vessels won the battle and took the castle of Severndroog, (as named by the English) in 1755, and was duly rewarded by the Company - and history! Severndroog Castle is just off Shooters Hill in South London, built by James's widow in his memory. The accounts there of his exploits, as quoted above, give no sense of anything but high moral purpose and justified brute force.

A larger and more enduring example is provided by the Opium Wars, which bore the more explicit mark of the British government. Foreign traders, primarily British, had been illegally exporting opium, mainly from India to China, since the 18th century. Widespread addiction in China was causing serious social and economic disruption. The first Opium War (1839–42) was fought between China and Britain, and the second (1856–60) involved France also. In each case the foreign powers were victorious and gained commercial privileges and legal and territorial concessions.

In March 1839, the Chinese government confiscated and destroyed more than 20,000 chests of opium warehoused by British merchants at Canton (as named by the British).

In 1840, the British government sent an expeditionary force up the Pearl River to Canton and, after months of negotiations, attacked and occupied the city. Subsequent British campaigns reinforced control.

The second opium war began in 1856, with a British warship travelling up the Pearl River estuary, bombarding Canton and skirmishing with Chinese troops. The French joined the British military expedition, part of which had been diverted to India to help quell the Indian mutiny of 1857 (called the Indian Rebellion by the Indians) and on arrival in China, the allies began military operations, captured Canton, deposed the city's governor and installed a more compliant official. The importation of opium was legalised in 1858. Almost by tradition, Britain established its lucrative trading rights, by force of arms when necessary.

Imports of opium into China escalated from 4,500 chests in 1799 to 40,000 in 1839, rising further after the second Opium War to annual imports of 70,000 chests by 1860. These were the enriching results of production in India, good transport arrangements and multiple outlets for sales. The business acumen allied to national government military support achieved profitable results. The harm done was immense. O'Farrell refers to the situation as, 'like the war on drugs, with the minor difference that we were then on the other side' (O'Farrell, 2007, p. 380). It is difficult to understand the opium wars as anything other than a viciously immoral trade inflicted on another country far away, with catastrophic effects on that population, and all done for huge profit. British

school children do not learn about that and a wider adult population is equally unaware.

These snapshots of British wars are linked to colonial expansion and commercial gain. India was just one theatre of operation, but Britain's management in Africa also displayed horrors which many citizens would prefer not to know about, or they attribute them to the odd wayward individual, like Jameson's wars in Matabeleland in 1893/4 and 1896/7. The 1950s probably saw the acceptance of an end to colonial dominance. Other European countries have dubious colonial records: the Germans in South Africa, Belgians in the Congo and colonies under the rule of Spain and Portugal; like the British, they all have their own culpability to deal with, sweep under the carpet, reinterpret or forget.

### **Britain's contemporary engagement with lesser developed nations**

In reality, decolonisation has not happened; control and exploitation have taken different forms. Now Britain imports cheap goods from places where workers are not paid a living wage, child labour is widespread and lucrative extraction of minerals goes on regardless of environmental damage.

Overseas Development Aid was £13.4 billion in 2016 when it reached the target of 0.7% of the Gross National Income. This is approximately one tenth of government spending on health but places the UK as one of the few countries in Europe reaching the United Nations benchmark (Full Fact Checking, 2107). This is no recompense for past plundering nor sufficient investment from the rich north to support developing countries.

More than one in five children in Africa works in quarries, farms and mines, amounting to an estimated 59 million children between the ages of five and 17 in sub-Saharan Africa alone (Kelly, 2016). They frequently work in the worst

forms of hazardous work. A later article by the same investigative journalist points to the tech giants of the west and east with insatiable demands for cobalt, mica and other rare minerals, appearing indifferent to the use of child labour. Apple, Google, Dell, Microsoft and Tesla have been named as defendants in a court case filed in Washington by a firm of international rights lawyers (Kelly, 2019). The court papers claim that the firms have the authority and resources to supervise and regulate their mineral supply chains and the fact that they have not exercised their responsibilities has contributed to injuries and deaths.

The chocolate industry is underpinned by child labour in West Africa, while in Zimbabwe children work for \$1 a week in the sugar cane plantations. Similar exploitation is found in plantations in Malawi run by British American Tobacco.

These firms earnestly disclaim responsibility and display their moral positions unconvincingly: ‘Apple is deeply committed to the responsible sourcing of materials’, as is Dell; Umicore has been addressing ethical supply for 15 years; and Microsoft claims that, in the event of questionable behavior or possible violation, will investigate and take action (Watts, 2019).

A different form of asset stripping occurs when the UK recruits professional staff trained at poorer countries’ expense. Ghana is just one country suffering from an exodus of teachers and doctors. Amuakwa-Mensa and Nelson write of the ‘brain drain’, ‘a mass exodus of medical professionals ... which leads to reduced health care services; impedes the home country’s health care systems’ ability to respond to change; and shrinks a vital sector of the economy, the ‘middle class’, that facilitates economic development in those countries’ (Amuakwa-Mensa & Nelson, 2014p. 123). The International Monetary Fund in a short section reflecting on the economic impact of migration on sub-Saharan Africa notes that it ‘entails a high social cost, as evidenced by the departure of

doctors and nurses from Malawi and Zimbabwe, which may mean welfare losses beyond those that are purely economic' (IMF, 2016, p. 198).

The business case for paying only what is necessary for work and materials from Africa is clear and the public relations industry works hard at deflecting responsibility. However, employment 'ethics' current in the UK and USA are not applied in the same way to the peoples of the African continent in what could be seen as devaluing their worth and a manifestation of 'erasure of black pain' (Moore & Sullivan, 2018).

'Environmental racism' describes injustices occurring in practice and in policy within a racialised context. Colonialism once focused on political and legal domination over territory, but in modern times, dependence, exploitation and inequality are often in the form of 'toxic waste colonialism' (Pratt, 2011; UN Environment Programme, 2018) and 'climate racism' (Phillips, 2019) where the rich north has created the climate emergencies but the poor south suffers most from the consequences. Such understanding is not part of the school curriculum nor of the wider public debate. These places are far away, and the people look different – and so a common feeling generated is that it does not matter.

### **Racial inequalities in today's Britain**

The UK is a multi-ethnic society and becoming more so. In the 2011 census, 86% of the population of England and Wales was registered as white (80.5 white British) down from 91% in 2001 and 94% in 1991 (ONS, 2011). The England school census for January 2020 shows that, of the 8,890,000 children in schools in England, 26% (2,320,000) are classified as non-white ethnic minority. 'Any other white background' comprises 7% (DfE, 2020). There is a clear need to adjust at every level to do more than simply 'accommodate' this diversity, and not just, or even mainly, because of growing numbers.



There are ‘factors which compel [people] to embrace ... race as their primary purveyor of identity’, (Ulysse, 2018, p. iv). Race is a socially constructed rather than a genetic term, ‘a frighteningly real, burning and omnipresent issue’ (Cole 2018 p. 53). Some of its roots lie in the superiority felt through the historical white domination of large parts of the world by the British establishment constituted of white, Anglican and aristocratic rule, with 'race' as something that happened elsewhere, 'not understood as central to modern British society before the second half of the twentieth century when migration .... began to change the demographic profile of the United Kingdom’ (Hall & McClelland, 2010, p. 1). Colonialism's influence on racism today is not to be underestimated and notions of 'Fundamental British Values' (DfE, 2014) which all schools are expected to teach - democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance - do little to address racism and have been questioned from the outset (Richardson & Bolloten, 2014). They remain a questionable ideological symbol when one asks if these are values are especially British, or in times past were applied to those whom Britain ‘ruled’.

In Britain in 2020, those of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin are more than three times more likely than White British people to live in the most deprived neighbourhoods. Rates of prosecution and sentencing for black people are three times higher than for White people. Unemployment rates are significantly worse for minorities; from mental health to education, crime to housing, current policies ensure inequalities that damage social cohesion and social justice. Most recently, ‘The unequal impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities may be explained by a number of factors ranging from *social and economic inequalities, racism, discrimination and stigma, occupational risk* [as well as] inequalities in the prevalence of conditions that increase the severity of disease including obesity, diabetes, CVD and asthma’ (PHE, 2020b, p. 9).

Black Lives Matter across the globe has given a renewed prominence to the inequalities in major respects, like being killed by the police or overlooked for promotion to the micro aggressions which people have been more willing to share like stop and search or asked to see your train ticket when entering a first class rail carriage when white people have walked straight in.

Afua Hirsch (2018) sees herself, her family and most of her friends as British, yet is often asked where she is from, concluding that, ‘A lot of people don’t fully accept that you can look like me and be British’ (Clark, 2018). One might expect that inequalities would be remedied and questioning the ‘Britishness’ of a black person would reduce if, in a the globalised world of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007), the past were more fully and accurately represented and relations with parts of the world inhabited largely by people of colour were less callously exploited, where foreign aid was not seen as a drain on Britain’s welfare budget and the curriculum was ‘decolonised’.

Decolonisation is discussed at higher education level (John, 2019; McIntosh et al, 2019; Moncrieffe et al, 2019) and in the school curriculum, but is at an early stage. Mohsin charges that, ‘There is an abyss at the heart of dishonest history textbooks’ (Mohsin, 2016). He reports how his students in their second year at university are furious on discovering the extent of their ignorance and he notes that his daughters, attending what is accepted as a good school, ‘have not once encountered Britain’s colonial past’. Matilda Marcus, still a school student and part of the Advocacy Academy in South London (a social justice youth movement), writes that, ‘the school system has avoided teaching a defining feature of Britain’s history from the past 300 years ... British colonies’ (Marcus, 2020). She points out that in Germany, children learn about the holocaust, but British school children learn nothing of the colonial past and

urges that, ‘those that set the national curriculum to teach our histories “Fill in the Blanks”’ (Advocacy Academy’s name for their project).

‘Little Englander nationalisms’ and ‘hierarchies of belonging’ with multiple groupings othered in varied ways and the multiple rationalities applied to justify non-acceptance – ‘as labour migrant, as welfare tourist, as culturally adversarial refugee ... as crass foreign capitalists’ (Valluvan & Kalra, 2019, p. 2396).

Black, Muslim and Gypsy Roma groups suffer opprobrium for differently expressed reasons.

Tomlinson (2019) and John (2019) make similar points about the spectral presence of empire – Gilroy’s (2004) ‘postcolonial melancholia’ - and the need for radical overhaul of curricula, bringing with it recognition of enduring white supremacy, domination, privilege, priority, advantage – and associated injustices. Educational changes, street protests and other forms of publicity may change ‘racialized consciousness’ (Ulysse, 2018) or interpersonal reactions to colour or accent but can be merely a sop to white supporters, counting only as ‘performative sympathisers’ (Miller, 2020), feeling morally elevated by their efforts but both falling short of practical action when faced with instances of race bias and not sustaining upward political pressure for change and challenging the systemic and structural supports for racism.

### **Reflection and mechanisms for change**

Apology, blame and guilt are not enough. Restitution or compensation are not feasible: those who did the deeds are not here to pay and those who suffered are no longer alive to benefit from any correction. Citizens should be better informed and have a fuller and more accurate perspective on their history through the school curriculum and public representations of race and racism in terms of both fact and morality. Selective glorifying of moments in Britain’s

history has implications for how other ethnic groups are perceived today, whether within the UK or internationally, sustaining myopic nationalism. Parts of the world suffer badly today because of decisions made by the British in their imperial heyday, Britain having departed from many of its colonies leaving a slight legacy of democracy but no infrastructure in terms of education or industry, and generations of slave descendants deprived of their own history, not welcome to participate in 'white world' which explicitly maintains a 'hostile environment' (Gentleman, 2019; Goodfellow, 2019). Equally, students should be aware of ongoing exploitation and harm inflicted on developing countries whether through waste dumping or enjoying products of child labour. That awareness is also not enough to address contemporary injustices of racism. Black Lives Matter, sparked by one instance, filmed for the world to see has unleashed a consciousness of the binary white domination of black peoples, where arguably historic justification is hard to sustain and contemporary experience marks it as stark injustice. As many have described, imperialism was a capitalist project which worked to extract value and dominate via military intervention when required, and, in in modernised form, those same capitalist institutions are at work, supported by a right turn in the politics of the UK and USA in particular.

Epic British histories give little space to the plundering of the colonies: Thompson (1963) concentrates on 'the Free born Englishman, artisan and working class society in its formative years, 1780 to 1832. Wilberforce, he of the ending of the slave trade fame, is much cited, but not at all in relation to slavery; however, a chapter section sub-headed *Peterloo* runs to 34 pages. The cover of Hobsbawm's *Age of Empire* (1987) depicts brawny industrial workers. In neither is there a sense of overseas exploitation and the part that the extraction of wealth from 'colonial possessions' played. Then there is the iconography from statues of Clive, Colston, Peel and Rhodes to the Dyce 1847

fresco in Osborne House on Isle of Wight showing *Neptune resigning the Empire of the Seas to Britannia* (ie Victoria) as she stands on shore with a lion looking out from behind her: strength and threat only to be called into action to right wrongs and protect hard-won, as they saw it, colonial interests. More alarming for its impact on official visitors to the Foreign Office is the Goetze 1914 *Britannia Pacificatrix* mural with its unapologetic and unexplained representation of British rule, allies paying homage and subjugated colonists. It is the case that, as Nichols (2020) writes, ‘these statues do not remind us of Britain’s imperial past, they *celebrate* it’.

While noting the impact of iconography of slavery and imperial domination in the UK and the wider messages of Black Lives Matter, particularly the eruption of protest across the world following the police killing of George Floyd in the USA, it is important to examine critically what would work to bring about change. It could be said that the UK and USA ‘have been here before’ and change has been slight.

Backward looking correctives are not enough. ‘Taking the knee’ is symbolic. Pointing at ‘white supremacy’ alone is a distraction. ‘Institutional racism is ‘nebulous and ... needs to have historical, economic and political foci’ (Cole, 2016 p.15). ‘Intersectionality’ is an academic shuffling of factors. The visible groundswell of support on the streets to combat the worst of racism is an important phenomenon with upsurge of ‘allyship’, yet hashtags, banners, changing mindsets and sociability will not solve racisms in their different forms unless attention is fiercely directed at the economy, the distribution of income and assets and greater state control of wealth production. That means engaging meaningfully the dominant political powers.

‘Commissions of enquiry’ are a part of political engagement, but, unless followed through with vigour, can serve as strategic ploys, one kick away from ‘the long grass’. This is amply demonstrated in the UK over recent years with the disregard of government for the recommendations of commissions of enquiry which it has itself set up: 35 recommendations in the Lammy Review (2017) of BAME individuals and the criminal justice system (105 pages); 110 recommendations in the Angiolini (2017) review into deaths into police custody (286 pages); 30 recommendations in the Williams review (2020) into the Windrush scandal (275 pages); 26 recommendations in Baroness McGregor-Smith’s review (2017) into workplace discrimination (92 pages). The Public Health England reports (PHE, 2020a and b), on *Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19* (89 pages and 69 pages). Authors of these reports have registered disappointment or anger at the lack of tangible outcomes from, collectively, 850 pages, 201 recommendations and involvement of hundreds of stakeholders. A six page *Government response to Baroness McGregor-Smith* (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2020) on a key area, ‘race in the workplace’ concluded weakly that, ‘We believe that in the first instance, the best method is a business-led, voluntary approach ... and expect businesses will want to comply’ (p. 3). The monitoring report one year on is disappointing and is headed benignly, ‘Employers have work to do’ (BITC, 2018). The prime minister has proposed a new *Racial Disparity Commission* and to hold ‘a national conversation about race’ (The Telegraph, 2020) which raises no expectations for change or improvement.

Social class, ethnic or gender inequalities are, if not purposefully created, then allowed to embed because of the benefits to capitalist, elite interests. Allied media power render them as unobjectionable, if not inevitable, parts of modern life. As Giroux argues, ‘As the social is individualized, it becomes more difficult to translate private issues into systemic considerations’ (Giroux, 2020).

The flattening of hierarchy, the reduction of poverty, the better funding of welfare, better housing for the least well-off, fairer employment regulations which are enforced and the recognition of the benefits of migration in a reality of global interdependence is called for. Action to achieve this is long term and on a broad front but there is a basis in education to develop a critical consciousness moving in this direction.

Returning to schooling, Apple (2018) rightly notes how curriculum theorising in the UK, as in the USA, is disregarded, outmanoeuvred and has ‘lost its way’ (p. 689), but must reassert itself to deserve a place in practical curriculum making. The curriculum will always be an ideological project and ruling political elites have made it an unthinking administrative responsibility. The forces are there for countering, undebated impositions and Apple reminds us of ‘the crucial importance of the school as an arena of and for cultural and social mobilizations’ (p. 688).

While comparisons with the USA are relevant for the similarities and differences in race history and current discriminatory contexts (Parsons, 2020), each country should engage with its own history responsibly in terms of past sins and achievements because it impacts on today’s attitudes and behaviours towards others, at home and abroad.

Of vital importance is a curriculum to think with. In school history, geography and literature, it is not a matter of inserting a new set of “truths” about the world, the peoples in it and the exercise of Britain’s power over centuries, but to give pupils the material to debate, form their own views and discuss with each other and their parents the way the world is and what has made it this way.

Wars and international relationships have developed out of a global history in which Britain has played a significant part, yet ‘common knowledge’ and the

contents of the curriculum in schools in England are poorly designed in content, transmission and assessment to equip students to engage with indeterminate and controversial issues which impact on views and decisions today. Such a corrective should allow the views of writers who praise the empire and Britain's role, from Macaulay (1848) to Fergusson (2003), alongside 'left-inclined revisionists' from Williams (1995, but originally 1944) to Hall et al (2014). Was it a kleptocracy, benign rule or somewhere between or different things at different times and in different places? Current questions arise in connection with Windrush (John, 2018) and the 'hostile environment', Grenfell Tower (Baker-Jordan, 2017) and unsafe housing the poor and ethnic minorities, Brexit (Shilliam, 2018) and the associated nationalism, xenophobia and exclusion. Then there is the police and criminal justice treatment of ethnic minorities (Lammy, 2017; Angiolini, 2017) raised to global prominence following the one, tragic, filmed instance of George Floyd asphyxiated under the knee of one police officer in Minneapolis with three officers alongside. Historical and contemporary material of this sort is the stuff of education.

Schools in countries under right wing administrations are moving the state provision of schooling into the private sector and reinforcing it as a commodity, emphasizing its grading function and teachers as delivery technicians. Giroux rightly warns that, for students, 'Neoliberal pedagogy reproduces the myth that economic prosperity has nothing to do with economic justice, and that increasing levels of inequality and the concentration of wealth in few hands will produce prosperity and increased levels of social mobility' (Giroux, 2020), and space for these discussions needs also to be brought back into the curriculum. We have lost sight or use of educationists like Dewey (2002 - originally 1916), Bruner (1960), Peters (1967), Lawton (1973), Stenhouse (1983) and controversial issues, White (1973) on aims of education, Vygotsky (1978) with 'zone of proximal development' and 'scaffolding', (Young (1971) on 'education



and social control’, along with more radical writers such as Freire (1974) with ‘critical consciousness’ or von Glasersfeld (2003) and ‘radical constructivism’, erased from such teacher training. We need a teaching force once again in touch with theory, reflecting on aims, on educational philosophy and the social context of education. We would want to see the paradox of education made real by nurturing the consciousness and confidence of learners to examine themselves and their societies, in an environment rich in material and ideas, generous and delighting in exploration and discussion that would include race and racism, past and present with notions of social justice. It becomes all the more important as racism itself changes with evolving local situations and national narratives. Rather than in decline, Whiteness and racism have been relegitimised with the right turn in politics in USA, UK and Europe (Lea et al., 2018). While waiting and working for the ‘revolutionary transformation of economy and society’ (Hill, 2019, p. 91), there are preliminary steps for which the dramatic, global BLM and Covid-19 events will disallow any simple return to the old normal.

It might fall short and be less ambitious in intention and time-scale and disappoint those with more radical and revolutionary aspirations some substantial goals. However, confronting racism as it morphs and reconstitutes itself is one substantial challenge. Reconfiguring the history shared with children, raising awareness of modern imperial action and recognising and taking a view on current racial injustice alongside token, stalling responses to it would be progress. Bringing schools back into local democratic control, with teacher education preparing teachers for with a mission as ‘critical educators’, managing controversial issues, aware of their ‘cultural agent’ role and able to locate themselves in the wider political and economic structures. Earick is not alone in making the accusation that the popular hegemonic multicultural paradigm, appropriated by white professional educators, ends up colonizing and

de-radicalising educational provision, going on to say, ‘White privilege and power focus on racial injustice as a passive act, with historical baggage passed down unknowingly “to” Whites without their direct knowledge, rather than focusing on the daily “active role” Whites play in the perpetuation of global White supremacy’ (Earick, 2018, p. 805). Steinberg shares her struggle to ‘decolonise, equalitise and diversitise’ (Steinberg, 2020, p. 26) and would move the schooling experience away from ‘the limiting ‘knowledge-based curriculum’ (Gibbs, 2015) to something more expansive and enabling. These are large and immediate media, education, public pedagogy and social justice challenges, vital early steps to effect the political change required to achieve a non-discriminatory society, redistributive economies and inclusive welfare provision.

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