The Imperial/Neoliberal University: What Does It Mean to Be Included?

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Introduction

This chapter examines literary experiences of higher education in the UK. The writers analysed here, Diran Adebayo and David Dabydeen, consider themselves outsiders to elite educational institutions. Both write about being admitted (included or otherwise) into Oxford University. The *Rhodes Must Fall* movement began at the University of Cape Town in 2015 and swiftly spreading to other universities in South Africa and then to Oxford. What emerged was a movement which highlighted the institutional structures complicit in colonial knowledge production, and the underrepresentation and oppression of Black and minority ethnic students. The calls to decolonise Oxford inspired my focus on writer's accounts of Oxford University. Whilst geographically specific, their experiences shed light on the experience of being included in imperial/neoliberal higher education institutions across the globe.[1]

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Their accounts nuance our thinking on 'widening access', but also highlight the social, political, intellectual and emotional cost of being included.

Dabydeen's *The Intended* (2005) and Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996) offer insight into the ways race, gender and class influence educational processes and demonstrate the psychic damage caused by assimilation into educational institutions *as they are*. The texts reveal the ways in which universities admit 'diverse' bodies, and simultaneously, destroy alternative ways of thinking and being. They describe the tribulations of access to education, adding nuance to our understanding that access 'is not simply a bureaucratic procedure, but shows how spaces are orientated toward some bodies […] accessibility and inaccessibility are also a result of histories that congeal as habits or shared routines' (Titchkosky in Ahmed 2017: 109). This chapter does not propose that Dadydeen and Adebayo offer a series of autoethnographic truths, which easily translate into a diagnostic of the British higher education system. However, their writing does texture our understanding of inclusion, exclusion, assimilation, navigation and rejection of imperial higher education institutions. The texts, and my reading of them, may invoke feelings of resonance with institutional inclusion and exclusion, or feelings of complicity. The novels offer readers a visceral understanding of the violence of imperial institutions; an analytic frame which is different but equally as important as an empirical understanding. Through themes and metaphor (I pick up on themes of relationships and kinship in this chapter) the texts move beyond diagnostic towards a curative sense of what decolonisation takes, and what it feels like. In other words, as Sylvia Wynter (2009: 53) prompts us, we must consider what texts *mean* is inseparable from what they *do*, and of course then, what the interpretation of texts command us to *do* rather than simply *accumulate* (individual academic capital) from their interpretation.

This chapter picks up important themes in this collection: namely, the tensions between internationalisation, diversity and widening access and participation. Who is included in the imperial/neoliberal university and for what reason? What does access and inclusion into the university mean and what does it cost for those traditionally excluded? And what do the

movements and theorists of decolonisation bring to the debates over the tension between internationalisation, diversity and widening access and participation? I choose to use 'imperial/neoliberal' university to flag the continuing importance of the imperial history of the university to its current political/economic formulation as neoliberal (Dear 2018).

The Politics of 'Inclusion'

In the context of higher education and beyond, feminists of colour reveal the ways that diversity is co-opted by power and institutions as a way of managing conflict and containing dissent (Mohanty 2003; Puwar 2004; Ahmed 2012). Indeed, in response to demand for substantive structural change by *Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford*, the University of Oxford invested in diversity and public relations campaigns (Oxford University 2017). Sara Ahmed has developed a sustained theoretical account of the politics of diversity and inclusion whereby, 'Diversity is often used as shorthand for inclusion, as the "happy point" of intersectionality, a point where lines meet' (Ahmed 2012: 14)'. This tension is all the more evident in British universities today (when diversity and inclusion come into conflict), whereby the diversity heralded by internationalisation threatens domestic widening access targets.

At the University of Glasgow, international student numbers have risen from 2320 in 2008 (11% of all students) to 5751 in 2017 (21% of all students) (University of Glasgow 2018). This means a greater diversity of students, but also potentially fewer places for targeted access students living in Scotland.[2] This tension begs the question who is included in the imperial/neoliberal university and for what purpose? Mohanty argues that diversity 'bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmonious empty pluralism' (Mohanty in Ahmed 2012: 13–14). Ahmed also writes about the connection between diversity, institutional whiteness and the mainstreaming of institutionalised racism. Dadydeen and Adebayo confront their readers with the sometimes-brutal reality of their access to elite higher education. Reading their novels in the context of contemporary education tensions and debates provokes consideration as to what are the benefits of inclusion and access without decolonisation.[3]

The Politics of 'Access'

In many parts of the world, access to elite higher education institutions is conceived of as a panacea for social mobility and societal change. The British government indicators for social mobility include, 'higher education participation in the most selective institutions' (UK Government 2015). The link between an elite education and social mobility is express. Westminster and the devolved governments continue to emphasise widening access to higher education as a strategic priority.[4] But despite renewed impetus, significant progress on widening access—especially into elite institutions—is questionable.[5] This has been exacerbated by the fee increases in England and Wales (and to a lesser extent Northern Ireland), and cuts to college funding in Scotland.[6]

Widening access to higher education for disadvantaged groups is quantified by access and entry to higher education institutions, retention during studies, attainment and the quality of progression into the labour market after graduation. In terms of entry, the gap in progression rates between students from state and private schools to elite institutions widens rather than closes year on year. In England, the gap was 43 percentage points (UK Government 2017: 1). Many of the most disadvantaged students targeted for widening access programmes are the most likely to drop out (UK Government 2014); 10.3% of Black students drop out of university, compared to 6.9% for the whole student population (Social Market Foundation 2016: 7). Black graduates are already three times more likely to be unemployed within six months of graduation than their white peers (Higher Education Academy 2012: 4). The literary analysis herein gives us some idea why this might be the case.

This chapter focuses on the political, cultural, intellectual and emotional dimensions of 'inclusion' and 'access'. *Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford* argue that decolonisation goes beyond iconography and representation. This chapter adds weight to the argument that numeric equality and representation of marginalised groups in higher education is only part of the story, and without radical transformation of institutional environments, curriculum, pedagogy etc. widening access is a vaunted concept.

Decolonising Oxford?

> And what I realised the moment I got to Oxford was that someone like me could not really be part of it. It's the peak of the English education system. […] one was coming also not just to England, but to the heartland of the English, the pinnacle of the English class system, the high point of English education and experience […] that was a very profound shock. (Stuart Hall in Akomfrah 2013)

In 1951 Stuart Hall won a Rhodes scholarship. Leaving Jamaica to study English at Oxford University, he went on to become a founding figure of the New Left, an architect of Cultural Studies and an influential figure in British left politics. However, in an interview conducted in 2007 he stated that he felt,

> much less at home here [Oxford] now than I did when I came. […] I have lived here for 57 years but I am no more English now than I ever was, […] In the back of my head are things that can't be in the back of your head. That part of me comes from a plantation, when you owned me. I was brought up to understand you, I read your literature, I knew 'Daffodils' off by heart before I knew the name of a Jamaican flower. You don't lose that, it becomes stronger. (Hall in Adams 2007)

In this chapter Oxford becomes the symbolic epicentre of the Western imperial schooling. *Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford* fixed attention on Oxford, as do the Rhodes Scholarships. However, it is not my intention to make Oxford University an exception, or to be considered so very different to other imperial institutions, be it Cambridge, Coimbra or Columbia. Oxford University has been extensively written and rewritten in English. In *The English University Novel*, Mortimer R. Proctor states that 'by the end of the nineteenth century […] the novels about Oxford and Cambridge were so numerous that they clearly represent a striking literary phenomenon' (1957: vii). A phenomenon, of course, with a narrow focus: nineteenth and twentieth century English literature. Representations of Oxford are profligate and inspired many admirers and detractors.

In their analysis of race, inequality and diversity in British higher education, Claire Alexander and Jason Arday make it clear that the whole higher education sector (not just Oxford and Cambridge) are implicated in elitism and institutionalised racism:

> University institutions have themselves proved remarkably resilient to change in terms of curriculum, culture and staffing, remaining for the most part 'ivory towers' — with the emphasis on 'ivory'. (2015: 4)

In his survey of the rise of education systems in England, France and the US, Andy Green (1990) singles out England as the most explicit example of the use of education by a dominant class to secure dominance over subordinate groups. Education for those outside the ruling classes was designed to contain and pacify, not educate and liberate (Reay 2001). In an age of mainstreamed widening participation programmes, diversity agendas and inclusion indicators, notions of education as an express feature of social, political and economic pacification could be viewed as dated. Dabydeen and Adebayo describe how their pacification and alienation occurred within elite higher educational institutions. In an age of neoliberalism, the education sector is on the one hand opened up to privatisation and corporatisation and on the other increasingly important to national economic growth and state border control. In this chapter I seek to connect thinking on the political economy of education, internationalisation, inclusion and widening access, to imperial history and decolonisation. I ask what the movements and theorists of decolonisation offer in terms of seizing back control, agency and impetus within the imperial/neoliberal university? In doing so, I tease out the relationship between the Eurocentric curriculum, institutionalised whiteness, and its benefactor and most gifted student, finance capital.

The Cost of Inclusion

David Dabydeen's first novel *The Intended* (1991) is an account of a writer's journey from Guyana, through London, to be educated at Oxford University. Dabydeen's own life took him at just eighteen to

study at Cambridge, yet the character in his novel goes to Oxford, perhaps to establish critical distance while drawing parallels to his own experience. Dabydeen's novel brings race and class into focus; the psychic damage that the conscious act of assimilation into the elite higher institution inflicts on a young person. The text reveals the ways that the university whilst allowing certain (disciplined) 'diverse' bodies to enter, simultaneously, destroys alternative ways of thinking and being, in particular, the knowledge born of community and kinship ties.

The Intended is narrated in four parts, beginning and ending in London. The unnamed narrator relays experiences from Guyana, London and Oxford. The novel communicates different perspectives from the immigrant community of Balham, London in the 1980s; themes include, identity, community, the pursuit of social mobility through education, survival, and the impact of the imperial university on a vulnerable young person. The refrain running throughout the novel—of memory and community—comes from Auntie Clarice in Guyana, who sends the protagonist off to England with this phrase, 'you is we, remember you is we' (Dabydeen 2005: 32). At this point the writer belongs, his identity is his community (Glasser 1999).

The community of Balham he finds himself in is different and initially alienating. The protagonist reflects affectionately on the Asian diasporic community in London:

> It was the re-grouping of the Asian diaspora in a South London school ground. Shaz, of Pakistani parents, was born in Britain, had never travelled to the sub-continent, could barely speak a word of Urdu and had never seen the interior of a mosque. Nasim was more authentically Muslim, a believer by upbringing, fluent in his ancestral language and devoted to family. Patel was of Hindu stock, could speak Gudjerati; his mother, who once visited the school to bring her other son, wore a sari and a dot on her forehead. I was an Indian West-Guyanese, the most mixed up of the lot. (Dabydeen 2005: 8)

But it is the protagonist's relationship with Rastafari Joseph which has the most depth. Joseph's personality, his interests and fate, acts as a foil to the protagonist. The drama of escaping the squalor of Balham whist

holding on to the 'we' is complicated by their friendship and literary engagement. The protagonist is on the road to Oxford, whilst Joseph succumbs to his seemingly inevitable fate as a Rastafari, illiterate, homeless, care-leaver from Balham. The novel leaves Joseph disturbed and vacant drawing pictures in the mud in a squat. Their joint readings and different engagements with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, function metaphorically in the novel. Their readings texture discussion on education, inclusion and survival. On Sunday's in his bedroom, the protagonist replicates a classroom with his friends:

> Joseph would tag along now and again to listen to us analysing Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.* The two of them sat on the bed and I, the professor, took the chair. I would select key passages from the text, read them aloud and dissect them in terms of theme and imagery, as I had been taught to do by our English teacher. (Dabydeen 2005: 70)

Despite being unable to read the text himself, Joseph rejects their interpretation of Conrad and offers his own. He makes the boys repeat the section of the book detailing the encounter with Black people.

> You been saying is a novel 'bout the fall of man, but is really 'bout a dream. Beneath the surface is the dream. The white light of England and the Thames is the white sun over the Congo that can't mix with the green of the bush and the black skin of the people. All the colours struggling to curve against each other like rainbow, but instead the white light want to blot out the black and the green and reduce the world to one blinding colour. (Dabydeen 2005: 72)

In this passage, Dabydeen connects white supremacy with intellectual and spiritual homogenisation, and schooling caught up in the inculcation of whiteness. Joseph has a way of interacting with and knowing the text which is different to his friends. The passage contrasts instinct and experiential interpretation with the scholasticism of formal schooling. The protagonist rejects Joseph's 'crazy exegesis', and in doing so, we see the beginnings of the colonisation of his brain through 'correct'

interpretation and disciplinary—compartmentalised and controlled—thinking. Joseph continues:

> 'And don't you think,' he said, 'that when Marlow say nothing about Kurtz in the end, is because nothing left to say, because Kurtz become nothing? He become a word, just a sound, just the name 'Kurtz', like the colour 'black'? Conrad break he down to what he is, atoms, nothing, a dream, a rumour, a black man. I know what Kurtz is. When I was in borstal I was rumour. They look at me and see ape, trouble, fist. […] And all the time I nothing, I sleep and wake and eat like zombie, time passing but no sense of time, nothing to look out of the window at, nothing to look in at, and no ideas in my mind, no ideas about where I come from and where I should be going. You can't even see yourself, even if you stand in front of mirror, and you seeing is shape. But all the time they seeing you as animal, riot, nigger, but you know you is nothing, atoms, only image and legend in their minds'. (Dabydeen 2005: 74)

Joseph recounts the conditioning violence of the institution. Reducing him to little more than a monosyllable (echoing the reduction of Conrad from Konrad Korzeniowski), the weight of history and racism, denying him the autonomy of ideas and the ability to know himself and where he has come from. The protagonist is perplexed and intrigued at the way his friend weaves his personal history into the text. But he cannot afford Joseph's imaginative flight to consume him even if he wanted it to: 'I wished for a moment that I had the freedom of his ignorance, his irresponsibility. As it was I had essays to compose in the normal way, proper books to read, exams to take, a future to chart out. I couldn't afford to take the risks as he could' (Dabydeen 2005: 115). The potential of intellectual endeavour as a transformative process is quashed into the necessities of inclusion into an institution and therefore survival.

Joseph maintains that 'black people have to have their own words' (Dabydeen 2005: 107). To the narrator at this point in his life and education, black words cast him back to the proverbs of Guyana. As his life becomes harder and his journey more isolating, his will to assimilate becomes stronger, and his desire towards more disciplined and 'civilised' knowledge increases:

> No wonder they're treated like animals, I heard myself thinking, distancing myself from all this noisy West Indian-ness, and feeling sympathy for the outnumbered whites […] I'm dark-skinned like them, but I'm different, and I hope the whites can see that and separate me from that lot. I'm Indian really, deep down I'm decent and quietly spoken and hard-working and I respect good manners, books, art, philosophy. I'm like the whites, we both have civilisation. If they send immigrants home, they should differentiate between us Indian people and those black West Indians. (Dabydeen 2005: 127)

Shaz calls him out on his gravitation, 'You are just pretentious with all that book talk. All you want is to imitate the white people, because you are ashamed to be like me, ashamed that people will call you a Paki' (Dabydeen 2005: 142). The narrator positions his survival as tied to assimilation to white society, institutions, ways of being and knowing. The idea of holding on to tradition, kinship and choice (between his worlds) dissipates throughout the novel as the grip of poverty strengthens.

Shaz and the narrator visit Joseph in his squat. Joseph writes with a stick in the muddy floor. After the narrator reads the word 'cocoon' out to him, he says 'That's what I been writing all day, waiting for you to come and interpret' (Dabydeen 2005: 139). At this point the narrative flashes forward to a scene in Oxford:

> I couldn't see, not for years, not until the solitary hours in Oxford University library trying to master the alien language of medieval alliterative poetry, the sentences wrenched and wrecked by strange consonants, refusing to be smooth and civilised, when Joseph returns to haunt me, and I begin to glimpse some meaning to his outburst. He stalks me even here, within the guarded walls of the library where entry is strictly forbidden to all but a select few, where centuries of tradition, breeding and inter-breeding conspire to keep people of his sort outside the doors. I am no longer an immigrant here, for I can decipher the texts, I have been exempted from the normal rules of lineage and privilege; yet he, an inveterate criminal, keeps breaking into the most burglar proof of institutions, reminding me of my dark shadow, drawing me back to my dark self. (Dabydeen 2005: 139–140)

The narrator eschews the identity of an 'immigrant' in order to become a don. John Agard's poem, 'Listen, Mr. Oxford Don' opens, 'Me not no Oxford don / me a simple immigrant'; Agard remains himself but uses the language of the establishment against its violence (Agard 1985: 44). At this turning point in Dabydeen's text, he claims to have 'been exempted from the normal rules of lineage and privilege', his key to doing so is 'deciphering the texts' (Dabydeen 2005: 139–140). However, the communal interpretation of Conrad alerts us to the manner and price of this admission. Joseph's creative exegesis does not grant him admission, the access codes are predetermined, disciplined, and foretold. Deciphering means leaving behind Guyana and Balham, it means ultimately the protagonist's refashioning by imperial subjectivities. According to this interpretation, the university does not (cannot?) accept difference; access depends on assimilation into white society, curriculum, pedagogy etc. This brings us back to Andy Green's point about the purpose of the English education system: to liberate or to ensure dominance over subordinate groups (1990).

The narrator recognises that Joseph's half formed attempted work is similar to his half formed self, constantly being broken down by police, institutions, poverty, and 'the condition of blackness' (Dabydeen 2005: 140). The narrator imagines Joseph self-immolating, 'purifying himself of all the shame and desire by burning off his black skin, once and for all cracking and peeling it off, so that when the fire died there was mostly molten flesh, meat that could have been that of a white man […] Or perhaps he wanted to burn like a Hindu corpse to show us Asians that he was no different from us, that he was not an inferior being, that 'you is we', as Auntie Clarice had said' (Dabydeen 2005: 140). Out of this communion with his friend, the narrator begins to write:

> […] in the broken way that he spoke, the broken way of the medieval verse, paying no attention to sense or grammar, just letting the words shudder out and form themselves. I am spell-bound by his memory, I write in fits of savagery, marking the pages like stripes […] when I look at what I have written I am utterly depressed. It is a mess of words, a mere illusion of truth. Joseph would have done better. His confusions held some meaning. (Dabydeen 2005: 141)

The narrator abandons himself to history, memory and the creative process, the violence of it reminiscent of tortured slaves. In doing so the psychic rupture in the face of the university environment is clear:

> I suddenly long to be white, to be calm, to write with grace and clarity, to make words which have status, to shape them into the craftsmanship of English china, coaches, period furniture, harpsichords, wigs, English anything, for whatever they put their hands and mind to worked wonderfully. Everything they produced was fine and lasted for ever. […] We are mud, they the chiselled stone of Oxford that has survived centuries and will always be here. (Dabydeen 2005: 141)

Throughout, the narrator has sought assimilation to the values and knowledge of the white institution to survive Balham and Guyana. But as he sits within it he is consumed by a sense of his own difference and inferiority. As he sits in the antiquated and carefully preserved library his emotions towards his friend shift:

> I begin to despise Joseph, his babbling, his half-formed being, his lack of privilege, his stupid way of living and dying. I will grow strong in this library, this cocoon, I will absorb its nutrients of quiet scholarship, I will emerge from it and be somebody, some recognisable shape, not a lump of aborted, anonymous flesh. (Dabydeen 2005: 141)

His struggle, like Joseph's, is for survival first and foremost. But it is also a struggle to survive with something of the 'we' left intact. The narrator carves a path away from Balham towards the stability and safety he craves throughout the novel. But the pain of this assimilation is rendered acutely. What is also evident is the price of inclusion is loss: of his friend, of his community, but also something of himself. In the end, Joseph must be renounced, Balham must be left behind, Auntie Clarice's 'you is we' must be broken. The privileged cocoon of Oxford fosters his individual survival at the expense of his kinship ties and sense of belonging.

The theme of an elite or imperial education elevating the individual at the expense of their community is developed by many writer's reflecting

on an imperial education from Ralph Glasser (2006) writing at the end of the industrial revolution in the slums of the Gorbals to Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988) writing throughout the period of decolonisation in Zimbabwe (Dear 2017). In many cases, the writers force reflection on the curriculum, pedagogy and institutional space of educational institutions as expressly formulated to destroy collective revolutionary agency. Dabydeen's work offers a number of analytic inroads into the themes of this collection of essays: the psychological and emotional cost of inclusion into elite higher education institutions for those traditionally excluded; insight into the necessary process of individual assimilation; the relationship between in ingratiation of the individual and the breakdown of intellectual, emotional and spiritual ties with their communities, kin and alternative systems of knowing and being. These themes are picked up and elaborated by Adebayo in his novel on Oxford.

Inclusion and the (Im)Possibility of Relationships

Diran Adebayo builds on this sense of isolation and destroyed kinship in *Some Kind of Black* (1996). He chooses to texture these themes by revealing the impossibility of human relationships in the symbolic imperial centre. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon devotes much thought to the possibility of ethical human relationships in a situation where colonialism has destroyed social relations. Building on the work of Lewis Gordon (2000), Nelson Maldonado-Torres suggests that Fanon is 'the paradigmatic philosopher of love; or perhaps better […] a loving philosopher […] who think and writes out of love' (2008: 93). He elaborates,

> He [Fanon] was doing a war against war oriented by 'love', understood here as the desire to restore ethics and to give it a proper place to trans-ontological and ontological differences. (2007: 256)

What Maldonado-Torres claims is that Fanon was countering not only anti-black racism in Martinique or French colonialism in Algeria, but the force and legitimacy of an entire historical system (Western/

European modernity) which utilised racism and colonialism to naturalise the 'non-ethics' of perpetual war (2007: 265). Part of the modus operandi of this system was the fragmentation of social relations and human relationships. As such, the reclamation of these relationships would be crucial to overcoming colonialism and this state of perpetual war guaranteed by European modernity. Fanon writes,

> Today I believe in the possibility of love; that is why I endeavour to trace its imperfections, its perversions. […] it is our problem to ascertain to what extent authentic love will remain unattainable before one has purged oneself of that feeling of inferiority or that Adlerian exultation, that overcompensation, which seems to be the indices of the black *Weltanschauung*. (1986: 42)

The conclusion of *Black Skin, White Masks* has been read as a meditation on the revolutionary agency of love (relational ethics):

> It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world. Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself? Was my freedom not given to me then in order to build the world of the *You*? (1986: 42)

Adebayo attempts a fictional diagnostic of the (im)possibility of human relationships, crucially not only *in a colonial or postcolonial situation*, but under the conditions of life/death demarcated by and in Western/European modernity or 'the contemporary configurations of globalization' (Bhabha in Fanon 2004: xiii). The naturalisation of this state of war 'does not simply refer to the continuous exercise of war […] [but refers] to discourses and practices of racialization and their many combinations with other forms of difference. […] and the death ethic that is part of it find their most radical expression in the relations between those who appear to be naturally selected to survive and flourish and other who appear to be, according to the dominant narratives of modernity,

either biologically or culturally decrepit' (Maldonado-Torres 2008: xii). Adebayo's stage to explore denatured social and sexual relations is the very seat in which those values were forged and continue to be inculcated; Oxford University.

Like Adebayo, his protagonist, Dele, shares a Nigerian background and an undergraduate education at Oxford University (Oyedeji 2005: 348). The tone and content of his novel suggest that he is very much 'writing back' to the university and the social and political consequences of his education. The audience for this novel is also quite clear, as it directly and graphically depicts the racism present at the university, and also the corruption of social and sexual relationships the environment enables.

In *Some Kind of Black* the context of Oxford University is sketched through Dele's encounters and relationships with fellow students and also through his engagement in student politics and societies. Dele's attendance at student parties seems to be one of his principal activities at Oxford, but finally 'set the seal on Dele's disaffection with his Oxford career' (Adebayo 1996: 36). Adebayo links the classism and racism of his fellow students within a history of settler colonial imperialism:

> Tabitha engaged in a tireless quest for *Lebensraum*. She and her empire of kissy-kissy friends were set to graduate and keen to seal contacts for life. The five-year plan was to recreate the same scene in west London's Notting Hill. Her place had the usual nods to downward mobility that no cool posh girl these days could do without: a Student Loans Company policy plastered prominently on the kitchen wall, a Can't Pay/Won't Pay sticker defiantly underneath, and guests in their polished Doc Martens and lumber jackets. (1996: 22)

Tabitha's 'rag week's slave auction' is the final straw for Dele, as compliant fellow Black students join 'four members of the university's rugby team' to be sold to the highest bidder (Adebayo 1996: 36).[7] Dele deals with his outrage at the racist behaviour of his fellow students by turning his attention towards potential hook ups.

Is that really how he'd been coming these past three years for Tabitha to think she could run that slave fuckery past him? […] his eyes finally settled on the girl he'd liked from before and he ambled over. Her mouth was wide and her lips full for one of the Caucasian Persuasion. This was the only hint of wantonness about her person, for everything else came across starchy. Her tones were Home Counties clipped, like she thinks her shit don't stink. (Adebayo 1996: 25)

In *Colonial Desire*, Robert Young makes the connection between theories of race, class and gendered desire, arguing that the,

ambivalent axis of desire and aversion [is] a structure of attraction, where people and cultures intermix and merge, transforming themselves as a result, and as a structure of repulsion, where the different elements remain distinct and are set against each other dialogically […] This antagonistic structure acts out the tensions of a conflictual culture which defines itself through racial ideologies. (1995: 19)

Dele experiences both desire and aversion towards Helena. Adebayo glibly weaves together Dele's shame over the slave auction and his will to avenge this racism by a sexual encounter with Helena. 'He wanted to fuck Helena, he wanted to fuck English history, like some horn of Africa' (Adebayo 1996: 38). *Some Kind of Black* sits within the literary tradition of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1969) which sketches the psycho-social, sexual-political dimensions of the legacies of colonialism.

The context Dele and Helena are in makes their relationship dysfunctional from the outset. Their ability to act freely is curtailed, and instead they become representations of a group, engaged in power struggle:

He worried that if he told the whole truth, about his home life and the rest, it would lead to such a shift in the balance of power. It would have been an invitation to Helena to respond to him on the level of pity or sympathy […] He was too proud to let it come to that. Fuck it. […] No, it was best that he and Helena dealt with each other with a quickness and done. (Adebayo 1996: 37)

Dele's desire is 'quickness and done', but Helena prolongs their affair by her unwillingness to have penetrative sex with him. Instead, Adebayo achieves political effect by his awkwardly detailed description of their predicament. The racialised dynamics of their power play is foregrounded:

> She was forever touching his lips, or running her hand down regions of his soft, smooth body, as if trying to come to terms with the sheer negritude of it all. […]

> He liked looking at her back, though. Front-on he had to contend with the blue veins that ran through her hands like fault-lines, the individual qualities of her face and speech. But her back was a smooth slab of alabaster and he could hug up to it, inhale its perfumes and make play with images of an incoherent revenge. (Adebayo 1996: 37)

There are echoes of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* here, as Marlow encounters 'a cold and monumental whiteness' when meeting Kurtz's wife (2008: 182–183). Adebayo sketches out the theatre of objectification between his characters. Helena comments, 'All I'm saying, Del, is that before you get inside me I need to get inside you' (Adebayo 1996: 37–38). Although, Dele and Helena have a drunken reconciliation, their affair remains 'unconsummated'. This is important because it is a marker that Adebayo denies the possibility of this kind of closure or reconciliation. In later relationships with white women, he clarifies the entanglement of his current and future relationships with history and his past experience:

> He couldn't stand the vulnerability their affair made him feel; the sense that the power of judgement hung over him […] He found it harder to disentangle Andria from the humiliation of his family, and who knew how many small humiliations had escaped his knowledge, beginning with his father in his schooldays. And all that just set him thinking about Oxford again — just thinking about it made him feel faint. He just wanted to draw a fat red line under that whole period. Hadn't he said that Helena would be his last, even before all this? He wanted no intimate connection with those people anymore. (Adebayo 1996: 190)

The crucial link to the context of Oxford is offered again, as his attempts to disentangle his relationships from history comes up against the monument of the city. He wanted 'no intimate connection with those people', but of course, Dele could form no intimate connection with anyone at Oxford. The novel alludes that the context precluded such a possibility.

Even more insightful is that Dele also finds meaningful platonic relationships impossible in Oxford. He describes his encounters as 'a series of grotesque cameos' and his friendship with other Black students in particular as conditioned by the contextually created conditions of hierarchy and proximity to power (Adebayo 1996: 163).

> After three years of sharing his senses and flexing across the city, Dele was now the undisputed number one negro. For sure there had been some competition along the way […] the problem with his rivals, Dele reflected as he pulled on his smoke. They were all too speaky-spoky, as Oxford as yards of ale. But most students didn't want to hear that. No, sir! Be they Chelsea girls or strident left-wingers, they wanted danger, they wanted to play away just once in their lives. It was best to homey the hell out of them, indulge their romance of the real nigga! (Adebayo 1996: 19)

Amongst the few Black people at Oxford, Dele positions himself within a competitive hierarchy. Acknowledging the imposition of class, he says 'Well, there were the bloods who laboured at the British Leyland plant and lived on the big estates down Cowley way, on the east side, but they didn't count in the student scheme of things' (Adebayo 1996: 18–19). The town and gown divide at Oxford makes connection, kinship and community outside his comprehension. Inside the university, at the Black Students Discussion Group, Dele rejects the intellectual competitiveness of his Black peers. 'There was a certain wanky air of self-satisfaction bubbling under the surface at these Black Chats. Folk felt that whatever the problems had been out there, *they* had overcome them, they must be the *crème de la crème*' (Adebayo 1996: 21). After finding no community, Dele adopts the only other mask that seemed to fit.

Dele had developed a range of comic roles. He'd been a fool, he'd made few close friends, he could see that. He was unhappy although he was having a nice time. (Adebayo 1996: 22)

He is admitted, even included, but only as the fool and as a foil to other's expectations and desires. Adebayo's Oxford is one in which human relationships, political, social and sexual are bedevilled by race politics and more specifically, the race, gender and class politics of Oxford. 'But it hadn't been minstrelsy, more some toxic problem of self-presentation' (Adebayo 1996: 163). Adebayo is able to communicate and expand a familiar thread running through literature on those coming to Oxford, admitted, even included, but feeling outside and forever altered. Trapped in a seemingly interminable charade with hierarchy, power and proximity, Dele is an outsider in Oxford, but into his community in London, 'a true insider' (Adebayo 1996: 163). After his politicisation at the hands of police brutality, he is mocked by his peers:

It's interesting that the speaker himself admits that his time at one of Anglo-Saxon England's great seats of learning taught him nothing at all about the real world outside 'White people will be shaking your hand while pissin' on your feet!' (Adebayo 1996: 92)

Towards the end of the novel, weighed down by his inability to form relationships, Dele comments, 'He couldn't square the circle. He had always been some kind of black' (Adebayo 1996: 190). This communicates his feelings of indeterminacy, not wholly Black, because of his schooling at Oxford; vaunted by a sense of placelessness. This recalls Dabydeen's narrator losing Guyana and Balham. In addition to being a stage on which the theatre of Dele's not-quite-belonging is set, the characters appear to lose their agency in the face of the structured charade that is Oxford. As elaborated by both Adebayo and Glasser the city, the university, takes on agency in the protagonist's disempowerment. In *Some Kind of Black* the university environment does not just reflect wider patterns of racism in society, but the university becomes a microcosm in which the intellectual, interpersonal and structuring politics of racism are magnified.

I chose to contextualise Adebayo's work within the politics of inclusion and access in order to further elaborate empirical data on widening access, and as a feature of that retention, attainment and quality of progression into the labour market after graduation. UK Government research (2014) reminds us that those entering the university from historically disadvantaged communities targeted by widening access programmes are still the most likely to drop out, particularly Black students. Furthermore, Black graduates face more employment barriers after graduation than their white peers. After reading Dabydeen and Adebayo it is not difficult to see why this might be the case. However, the progression and barriers they describe into higher education will not be surmounted solely by representation, although this may be part of the solution. My argument here is that more attention to the social movements and theorists of decolonisation is key to wider comprehension of the problems they describe and broader and more meaningful institutional change.

Conclusion

Dabydeen focuses on the curriculum, pedagogy and community as he recounts his own transformation at the hands of an imperial schooling. He is currently a prolific writer, academic and former Ambassador to China for Guyana. Dabydeen's *The Intended* highlights what is gained from an imperial schooling, and what is lost at the same time. He makes the link between literary interpretation, the discipline of the humanities and the inculcation of institutional whiteness. His 'choice' to take what was on offer, and thereby survive the poverty of his early life, required him to leave behind his identity, traditions and community. Cecil Rhodes' Rhodes scholarships, endowments and other activities intended 'the establishment, promotion and development of a Secret Society, the true aim and object whereof shall be for the extension of British rule throughout the world' (Rhodes 1899). Reading Dabydeen brings into focus the idea that if Westernised elite education aspires to be anything other than Rhodes' 'Secret Society' it must look root and branch at the institutionalised learning environment rather than

simply looking to the diversification of personnel. This analysis has been brought to the fore by *Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford* amongst others.

Adebayo's Oxford is not bereft of Black community but still the protagonist cannot form the relationships and community he needs to survive the Oxford experience without psychic rupture. His account foregrounds race and sexuality as he attempts to recount the everyday racism and colonial mentalities which dominate the imperial centre. In *Season of Migration to the North*, Salih depicts a social world entirely conditioned by history and the colonial encounter: 'While in the throes of fantasy, intoxication and madness, I took her and she accepted, for what happened had already happened between us a thousand years ago' (1969: 146). Adebayo approximates this in contemporary Oxford. His character can muster neither the self-esteem nor the strength of kinship bonds to resist the structured drama of the university world. Both authors examine characters that have been included into Oxford University; both felt the need to write back to the imperial institutions they themselves had access to.

The Westernised imperial university as a globalised and neoliberal entity has raised new questions and tensions about access and inclusion. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) over 4.1 million students study outside their home countries, this is predicted to rise to 8 million (of a total 262 million worldwide) by 2025 (2015: 3). Top destinations for students are in the global north, top destinations for branch campuses are in the global south. Amidst this carnival of financial capital driven by students from the global south, diversity has become a commodity. The tension between widening access to the university for marginalised domestic groups and internationalisation, sharpens our attenuation to the 'empty pluralism' of the imperial/neoliberal university. Dabydeen and Adebayo show us something of the bedrock of imperial homogeneity that the diverse student body hits up against. However, their texts open a conversation about what higher education is like for some students and, potentially, what it should be like. Groups like *Rhodes Must Fall*, *Why Is My Curriculum White?* and *Unis Resist Border Controls* continue to demand answers to institutionalised racism, colonial knowledge production, and its relationship to underrepresentation. Their progress will inform a holistic (rather than tokenistic) view on access and inclusion.

Notes

1. The 'imperial/neoliberal' university refers to a hegemonic development of European institutions in tandem with imperial state power and neoliberal capitalism. As the imperial/neoliberal university becomes a global institution, as 'a place of authoritative knowledge, certified knowledge', it becomes 'the heart of epistemic violence' (Pillay 2015). Teaching occurred at Oxford from around the eleventh century making it one of the oldest universities in the English-speaking world. The university's own statistics reveal its entrenched elitism: just three prestigious private schools and two elite sixth form colleges produced as many entrants to Oxford and Cambridge as 1800 state schools and colleges across England (The Sutton Trust 2014).

2. In 2015–2016, 14.0% of Scottish domiciled full-time first-degree entrants to university were from the 20% most deprived areas (Scottish Funding Council Report on Widening Access 2017).

3. In the context of decolonial studies and the advent of the term 'coloniality' (Quijano 2007: 168–178). Decolonisation has come to mean more than that process and the establishment of nation states after formal colonisation ceased. Decolonisation (as groups like *Rhodes Must Fall* use it) has come to mean the attempted unravelling and relinquishing of coloniality—and perhaps therefore forms of imperialism too—that is the active opposition and destruction of the structures, conditions and lived experiences of colonialism's legacy.

4. The Scottish government instigated a Commission on Widening Access which produced a *Blueprint for Fairness* (2016).

5. 'Those from the most affluent areas are three times more likely to directly enrol from school to HE than their peers living in the most economically disadvantaged areas' (Sosu et al. 2016: 9).

6. See McCaig (2006), Havergal (2016).

7. Adebayo's account (published in 1996) is reminiscent of the *Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford's* 2015 campaign against the Oxford Union for their advertisement of the 'Colonial Comeback Cocktail' specially conceived of for a debate on British reparations to the former colonies. The group stated: 'This casual approach to offensive imagery exemplified the carefree way that the Union engaged with colonial history, an attitude that was rarely challenged in Oxford tutorials and lectures, in the Oxford community, and in the national discourse' (*Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford* 2015).

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