

# Racism and Colonialism in Global Higher Education

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07/09/21

# Bio and Motivation

## Bio

- Born and raised in Ethiopia- (the only African country not colonized by European states- although its HE curriculum now is one of the most colonized)
- worked all my life in Higher Education, and for some time in international development
- Taught in Two major public universities and one private university in Ethiopia
- Worked for international organizations for sometime
- Relocated to the UK since 2011

# Intro and bio

- I am interested in the topic neither because I am a sociologist nor an anthropologist but because of a newly found understanding of how 'race' is an important organizing principle of lived experience following my relocation in the UK
- Grew up as a proud Ethiopian- being taught that my forefathers and mothers decisively defeated racist colonial forces at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century at Adwa and many other similar battles
- So proud of that as I keep my name my culture, my calendar and most of all the spirit of independence and freedom and never budge to any repression

# Ethiopia's HE Curricula

Sadly, at present the Ethiopian HE curricula remains colonized despite Ethiopia's glorious anti-colonial history ; as a result it is disappointingly unresponsive to the developmental needs of the Ethiopian people

- The colonized curriculum is perhaps best defined by what is left out, erased and/or sanitized or undermined ; And also by who has the power to decide the content of the curriculum- both what and how to teach it
- Some recently argued the Western model of He is widely adopted by the global south and for the need to 'safeguard the fundamental values of the Western university model, dedicated to the search for truth based on scientific evidence' -
- I am arguing submission is not consent!
- And I am asking where did this dedication to truth go when they erase the the teaching of historical imperialism such as racism, slavery, the empire, colonialism- events supported by irrefutable and glaringly visible evidence!

# Colonized Curriculum excludes

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**Saint (Kidus) Yared (25 April 505 AD to 20 May 571 AD) Vs Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (27 January 1756 – 5 December 1791)**

# Some land marks ....

- Perhaps one land mark in the history of colonialism and racism is the arrival of the first 20 enslaved Africans at Point Comfort (currently known as Hampton) in Virginia, 400 years ago in August 1619;
- Following that White slave owners put their names on the black Africans they called and made them 'slaves'- to show ownership of them. Their real names were erased during slavery!
- In the process– rejecting their names, cultures and values, belief systems;
- They were not actually slaves- they were made into slaves; They were very important leaders and professionals while they were in Africa;
- More than 400 years after “Black Lives Matter” have forced a profound moment of reckoning by exposing the continued legacy of slavery, and other forms of historical imperialism

# My lived experiences here in the UK

- I never thought that 'race' (my skin color and place of origin) would so silently, subtly, but extremely profoundly impact my life and or life chances of my family, my community, until I came here
- All the things I am proud of my whole life (my name, my language, my culture, my country, ) overnight became a source of disadvantages, axes of exclusion and marginalization
- Even where I live here (my postcode, the neighborhood) not just by stereotype but by government policy became an important marker of disadvantage in education, health, employment etc.,
- 'at risk', 'hard to reach communities', 'FSM', 'BME", the exam tiering systems (GCSE tiering for example)

# Social location

- I live now in a high rise council estate (much like Grenfell Tower) and with all the risks associated with it-
- This an important cite of racialized domination oppression,
- For example if we just take education- seemingly innocuous state initiatives such as Education Action Zones (EAZ) , Excellence in Cities and the London Challenge, all of which serve to position inner city schools and the pupils within them as 'challenging' and problematic.



# My first Higher ed experience

- Found higher Ed more tribal and racist, alienating than even the wider society- at least my community! That was shocking!
- During my four month stay in the college, everything seemed a bit strange to me. From the gate to the classroom, and everywhere else in the college, I felt out of place. I felt that I was seen as a guest, not as a 'normal' student. Most people talked to me politely but differently – with care, suspicion, or even with sympathy, although they knew of no misfortune that had happened to me. I was confused, and could not understand or explain what was going on. Felt discombobulated;
- This motivated me to look at the UK black student's HE experience

# The Awarding Gap

Gary Loke, Director of Knowledge, Innovation and Delivery at Advance HE lamented:

.....progress on narrowing the ethnicity gap continues to be slow. The white-BAME gap and the white-Black gap have each on average changed by 0.3 percentage points between 2003-04 and 2018-19. At this rate of change it will be in 2070-71 when the white-BAME awarding gap will close, and 2085-86 when the white-Black awarding gap closes. This is rather depressing.'

# Experiences of BAIS

- explored the lived experiences of 21 undergraduate black African international students (BAIS) from sub-Saharan African countries through a qualitative research design through the theoretical lenses of Bourdieu and critical race theory (CRT).
- BAIS's lived experience is a function of the possession of capitals demanded by UK higher education, lower expectations and multiple racialized domination.
- Their overall experience is fraught with lack of acceptance, and they are positioned as lacking outsiders who are admitted to the institutions but not truly included.
- They experience racism and/or Othering from home white (and also black), other non-white international students, and members of the community in various social settings, both inside and outside the university.
- Within their universities, institutional structures and practices, such as online submission, seminar groups, predominantly white teachers, a Eurocentric curriculum and newer assessment methods, were unfortunately found to be sites of further disadvantages or racialized discriminatory treatment when BAIS did not readily fit into these practices and/or were perceived as deficient learners.

# Negative Experiences -before their HE journey

**Black people in UK 21 times more likely to have university applications investigated, figures show**

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/uk-black-students-university-applications-investigation-more-likely-ucas-figures-nus-labour-a8314496.html>

In the words of Ann Phoenix black students/people suffer from “Normalized absence and pathologized presence’ in research and scholarship

# The way forward....

- Until Global HE and in particular Western HE starts to actively engage in the teaching and researching of the true history of racism, colonialism, slavery, chattel slavery and all other forms of historical imperialism and promote a radical transformative scholarship , it will not only always be stained with racism and coloniality , it will also stinks of racism!

# New found understanding

- a black person living in the West can be a victim of systemic and /or structural racism without personally experiencing a single act of overt racism
- And that 'race' is not a monolithic concept that organizes life for all all black people in the same way but rather it gets complicated along national and class lines- my first experience of overt and hostile experience of exclusion and racism was from a black British person working in public service; they openly showed hate and told me I am uncivilized African who needs to go to college!

These issue will be further discussed by my brilliant friends, Dr. Chrystal George Mwangi is an Associate Professor of Higher Education at George Mason University  
and

Dr. Christina Yao is an Associate Professor of Higher Education and Program Coordinator for the Higher Education and Student Affairs Master's program at the University of South Carolina.

Their work is shaping our thinking in the areas of international student mobility, transnational education, and on how structures of opportunity and barriers impact how students access and navigate college and also (in)equities in higher education internationalization