"It's like very white winged": students' perceptions of the image and reality of Internationalisation in UK Higher Education

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Abstract

Following a damning report into racism in United Kingdom Higher Education (EHRC, 2019), this paper discusses students' experiences of racism in HE. Focusing on the connections between lived experience and wider goals and trends in the Internationalisation of the university sector, we discuss accounts of racist practices on campus through the concept of xeno-racism highlighted in data from a small-scale, in-depth qualitative study. Three main findings are highlighted. First, we suggest that racism is a predictable – even integral - feature of Internationalisation as it is currently pursued by UKHE. Second, we argue that our data provides evidence that the traditional forms of racism highlighted by the EHRC are part of a wider, deeper problem of xeno-racist treatment and troubling narrative practices. Finally, our analysis connects these practices to a degree of angelism in the Internationalised institution's self-image, portraying Internationalised HE in an idealistic but disingenuous way for financial gain. Together, these three phenomena undermine UKHE's altruistic claims by subordinating the issue of discrimination to questions of process, brand management, and reputational damage limitation. Tackling the problem of racism on campus cannot be successful without also tackling these issues.

Keywords: *higher education, racism, internationalization, marketization, angelism*

Introduction

Academic institutions, the media, and researchers have recently reported a culture of racist abuse, slights, and insults in the context of higher education in the United Kingdom (HEFCE 2014; BBC 2018; Coughlan 2018; Burns 2019; Guardian 2019; Love and Mohammed, 2020). These views were highlighted by the United Kingdom's Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2019, which reported a troublingly high incidence of experiences of racism on UK campuses (EHRC 2019).

We examine the details below, but a key part of the problem would appear to that of institutional blindness to the issue of racist practices:

> [Universities lack a] clear picture of much of the racial harassment that is taking place and are uninformed about the impact of their policies. This can cloud their assessment of the scale of the problem and how well they are responding to it. (EHRC 2019, p. 84)

This lack of a *clear picture* and the *clouded assessment* of the situation suggest that UKHE "does not fully understand racial harassment" (EHRC 2019, p. 8) and forms the basis of this paper. Racism itself, its implications for HE stakeholders, and even institutions' responses are not just misunderstood but actively downplayed and, often, manipulated. According to the report, HEIs "are [deliberately] not following guidance on how to handle complaints" since they see **"**little need to change their existing policies". Indeed, HEIs "rarely, if ever" discuss them (EHRC 2019, pp.11-12), ostensibly because HEIs "too often

place their reputation above the safeguarding and welfare of their students and staff" (ibid).

In this paper, we look closely at these aspects of the student experience and largely concur with the report's analysis. However, our empirical data suggests a more nuanced analysis is needed. First, we show below that racist discrimination on campus takes a particular form which, we argue, needs to be understood in context, namely of the Internationalisation pursued by UKHE. Second, while we agree that this context certainly can engender discrimination, xenophobia, and even racism, our data troubles our overfamiliarity with such narratives and their lexicon by suggesting that *xeno-racism* can be a more useful descriptor of these attitudes and behaviours. Our third point ties these together by identifying a form of *angelism* in the image management of Internationalised HE provision. This angelism, we suggest, plays a significant role not just in the treatment of "International students", but the wider Internationalised experience as a whole.

We examine these distinctions in detail below but turn first to a brief discussion of the EHRC report whose findings provide the background to our research, analysis, and conclusions.

The EHRC report

The UK's Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) published "Universities Challenged" – a questionable reference to a long-running TV quiz show - in October 2019. Based on data from universities in England, Scotland, and Wales, it sought experiences of racial harassment among staff and students with an initial online survey, a random online survey of 1000 British students, round-table discussions, and further desk-based research to provide a significant correlation between quantitative and qualitative data.

Focussing on direct experiences of racial harassment, 845 students and 571 staff responded. More than two-thirds (69% of students and 66% of staff) related personal experiences of racism on campus (EHRC 2019, p. 21). Over half of staff described incidences of exclusion on racial grounds, and 20% of students complained of physical attacks (EHRC, 2019, p.6 -7). Strikingly, the report describes high levels of actual verbal and physical threats and abuse rather than, for instance, examples of casual discrimination or unwittingly insensitive language.

If universities are to be "places of freedom, open-mindedness, and self-discovery" (EHRC 2019, p. 4), a strong anti-racist response seems appropriate. Several universities have indeed immediately endorsed the report by detailing their own anti-racism policy record (see e.g. University of Bristol 2019; University of Sussex 2019). The lecturers' and students' unions have also taken action (UCU 2019a, 2019b; Universities UK and National Union of Students 2019). The key issue for the EHRC, however, is that the problem might be viewed in a restricted way as a race issue rather than a much wider, deeper, institutional problem (EHRC 2019, p. 103). To understand why this matters, we need to understand how wider intuitional practices affect the response to this kind of problem. Our data focuses on the role of Internationalisation in this connection, suggesting that wider practices of essentialization, commodification, and marketization of the student experience are linked closely, if not causally, to discriminatory practices.

The Context: from internationalization to marketis\zation
Context is of course essential to understanding discrimination, and the EHRC recognizes the global challenges faced by UK Universities. In language that echoes global attitudes to the promotion of HE, higher education is "a hotbed of

innovation" which develops breakthroughs in science and technology and thus boosts industry at a time of great economic uncertainty (EHRC 2019, p. 4). This rhetoric is typical of connections often made between academic internationalization and neoliberalism, with universities as factories of knowledge servicing a putative global knowledge economy (see example, Raunig, 2013). This connection between HE and the economy is complex, however, and HEIs are more than just purveyors of learning. While subjected to the effects of globalization, universities are also active developers of cognitive capital and promoters of the knowledge economy. This accompanies the development of more democratic provision in British HEIs since the massification of HE in the 1990s which has brought more diverse, "non-traditional" student cohorts, and the increased variety of learning needs and motivations of those who access HE from home and abroad (e.g. Wingate 2015; Beighton, 2018; 2020).

International students, in this context, play a central role. More than just a crucial source of income to UKHE and the UK economy, their contribution to British society is "invaluable" because they bring new knowledge, cross-cultural understanding, and global ties of friendship (DfE and DIT 2019, p. 13). They enrich the education of domestic students and have the capacity to become "some of the UK's best advocates overseas" (ibid). The distinction between producer, consumer, and advertiser of HE has broken down as HEIs, their staff, and students are simultaneously both consumers and producers of globalizing effects (Beighton, 2017b).

This informs the way universities compete in the recruitment of such valuable assets as International students. Currently, over 458,520 students from around the world attend university in the UK (ISS 2019). Competition for these students has grown and led to a focus on the quality of the "experience" as a

marketing tool so that students continue to "invest" in higher education in the UK:

> As International student numbers continue to grow, so too do the number of competitors […] In the face of such challenges […] we must do more to ensure that a high-quality student experience remains at the heart of our offer, and that International students continue to see a UK higher education as a valuable, long-term investment (British Council, in DfE and DIT 2019, 11).

As part of this international strategy to promote "global potential" and "global growth", the aim is for the number of international students in the UK to reach a peak of 600,000 by 2030 (ibid). For universities to successfully ride the economic wave of change and maintain a certain competitive advantage, they need a powerful business plan with long-term market goals. These include providing students with a positive learning experience and drawing attention to the latter's importance by promoting a positive image of the institution and its International credentials (see BIS 2016; Swist and Kuswara 2016; MAC 2018).

Advocates of such marketization have long argued that it can reinforce universities' efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness while also bringing more transparency and reliability to provision. By also developing a consumerist perspective, universities can maintain high-quality services, using students' voices as a means to better democratic relationships between universities and students (see BIS 2016; DFE 2016; HEFCE 2016; DFE and DIT 2019; Advance HE 2019 for instance). Critics, however, point to a lack of evidence that this works. Some suggest that the argument for the competition is based on misrepresentation since universities compete not for value but resources (Nixon et al. 2016; Brown 2019). Others also contend that student mobility reflects an instrumental ideology and an economic rationale (Castro et al. 2016; Beighton, 2018). On this view, internationalization has ushered in a

focus on survival and self-preservation, suggesting a disparity between the altruistic discourse of internationalization and its more prosaic drivers. This deflects attention from both the content and the quality of provision at the institutional level, focusing the gaze on image, process, and ostentatious compliance with minimum level demands.

The Co-text: From self-preservation and self-interest to self-image

Our data, below, reflects this. International students know that they are perceived, described, and managed as if they were quanta of cognitive capital: a move typical of educational managerialism which determines learning and learners in logistical terms (Beighton, 2017a). Defined as "a flow in the financial capitalist setup" (Cole and Gannon, 2017, 79), our interviewees identify an intimate relationship between educational racism and internationalisation. They describe how the HEI's *self-preservation* lies in the ability to internationalize by commodifying the Other as a marketable good: "prioritizing increasing students' numbers for economic motives' (Castro et al. 2016, 430). Crucially, this commodification equates higher learning to speculation: it is the flow of resources, rather than the resources themselves, which has value to the institution.

This is the rationale behind the way HEIs in the UK is expected to become "Gold" standard institutions (BIS 2016, 4). Unafraid of hyperbole, they trumpet their "excellence" (DFE 2016; HEFCE 2017) and offer "high quality, equitable and global learning experience" and prepares students for "a globally interconnected society" (Advance HE 2019a). This rationale is essentially *self-interested* because the staff and students who are the co-creating prosumers of this liquefied economy are expected to guarantee the *interests* of the organization by ensuring flows of funds, knowledge, and "experience" as return on investment (see EHRC 2019, 5). This self-interest drives the way the

"poster" staff and students who represent the HEI's "prestige and funding" must be constructed in and protected from public view (EHRC 2019, 91). They are essential to the organization's *self-image*, and any negative publicity which might endanger the organizational self-image must be managed and where possible effaced in the interests of organizational sustainability. This management of an idealistic self-image is what we call *angelism*.

Angelism

The self-image described by our interviewees has little connection with the reality of International provision. Instead, it implies a form of *angelism* which regards human affairs "from an unrealistically sanguine point of view as though human beings were angels".[i] It ties the idealistic self-image of gold-plated excellence to the reality of feelings of inferiority and discrimination in white-dominated spaces. We use this term to underline the ways institutions have been quick to distance themselves from accusations such as racist practices and procedures. Such refutations seem angelistic insofar as they connote the deliberate idealization of an unpalatable reality. While belatedly publicizing processes and policies of anti-racism as the issue occupies the political agenda, evidence – including our interviews below – gives clear examples of students being treated as inferior, undeserving, and essentially problematic.

Our interviewees, below, are quite lucid about the negative impact of such angelism. Thus, when one of our interviewees describes the image of the internationalized institution as "white-winged", the evocative metaphor is doubly critical. It links the images of happy students and academic success used by institutions to market themselves to widespread experience and evidence of discrimination. Institutions seek to present a benevolent image of care, respect, and tolerance. Their marketing is "world class", "gold standard" and "excellent", but commercial self-interest, self-preservation, and a questionably

angelistic self-image serve to mask a troubling reality of racist discrimination, to which we now turn.

Xeno-racism

 As we will see, our data indicates that this discrimination takes forms that go beyond what might traditionally be understood as racism. Indeed, indiscriminate use of the latter term can lead to serious problems, the reception of the EHRC report being a case in point.   According to the national body responsible for representing UK students, the National Union of Students, the EHRC conflates anti-white racism with discrimination against Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students and staff (Batty 2019). For Batty, this conflation is unwarranted, reductive, and downplays the gravity of racism by eliding the incommensurability of two very different types of discrimination.

So, while appropriate in many contexts, there is some debate about how useful the term racism is in countering contemporary manifestations of exclusion, discrimination, and abuse in the context of globalization. Often associated with colonialism, slavery, and segregation, it is, some argue, restricted to "*visible phenotypical* markers" (Hakuho 2009, 48, our emphasis). Racism as a term thus tends to reduce identity to constructed beliefs about skin color and the body (Kyoo, 2014), leading to critics such as Di Masso et al. (2014, 343) to argue for "a more nuanced ideology of rejection" to understand these contemporary forms of discrimination.

The term "xeno-racism" has therefore been used to describe the ways discrimination reflects narratives constructed specifically around the idea of the impoverished stranger rather than the visibly different *per se.* Its controversial nature is reflected by the contrasting definitions that have been offered. For instance, while Dickins asserts (2014, 188) it "arises from xenophobia" and expresses "negative and discriminatory attitudes towards people who are

white", others contest both its roots in xenophobia and its specific link to skin color. Sivanandan (2001, 2) has perhaps been most influential in defining xeno-racism as a form of abuse that is not reduced to a response to skin color. Indeed, because xeno-racism is also directed at "poor whites", it can be passed off as xenophobia, a "natural" fear of strangers. However, Sivanandan argues (ibid):

> in the way it denigrates and reifies people before segregating and/or expelling them, it is a xenophobia that bears all the marks of the old racism. It is racism in substance, but "xeno" in form. It is a racism that is meted out to impoverished strangers even if they are white.

While Sivanandan's definition reproduces a questionable black/white binary, it remains useful in that it helps understand some of the highly problematic conflations behind racist practices, not least those in the EHRC report. Xeno-racism happens when the" Other" is not necessarily perceived as 'racially' different but rather impoverished by socio-economic, social, or cultural disadvantage. Thus, Cole (2017) in his discussion of xeno-racism, relates racism to the capitalist mode of production and the way many groups are exploited as a source of economic capital. Such exploitation is, Cole argues, not limited to color-coded racist discrimination, but rather an integral feature of xeno-racism which can affect white migrants in the same way it affects people of colour. Xeno-racism, he argues, should not be underestimated for this reason. Neither, moreover, should we overlook the way in which xeno-racism extends to the deprivation of basic rights: the bare life of *homo sacer* (Agamben 1998). It legitimizes native supremacy through an othering that deploys markers such as language and culture, rather than external markers to develop a discriminatory narrative that limits the number of identities available to populations (Popovski 2010; see also Catalano 2011).

Xeno-racism is therefore a useful term in qualitative research. On one hand, it focuses on narrative construction, the limitation of identity, and the definition of possibility in life experiences of Othered populations. On the other hand, it recognizes that this othering surpasses visibly minoritarian traits and overtly visible points of comparison, constructed or otherwise. It focuses instead on the stories told about others by those who benefit by imposing these narratives. A broader narrative has indeed emerged, involving a "demonization of the people that the capitalist western world seeks to exclude" (Fekete, 2001, 23). This narrative naturalizes the growth of societal distrust and more diffuse fears of alterity, migration concerns, the resurgence of nationalism and Islamophobia stemming in part from economic fears of the failure of global capitalism (e.g. Fekete 2009; Del-Teso-Craviotto 2009; Cole, 2011; Masocha et al, 2011; McCoy, 2018). This demonization has moved beyond traditional racist tropes in response to narratives around the preservation of economic prosperity and loss of national identity, targeting those who exhibit – or are presumed to hold - attributes such as being displaced, dispossessed, or uprooted. This applies to migrant populations in Europe, but others see intersections with narratives of islamophobia and criminalization (e.g. Popovski, 2010; Catalano, 2011; Varvin, 2017; Boeyink, 2019).

Universities, some argue, have become part of this presumptive trend when reverting to "essentialist discourses" (Dippold et al. 2019, 324), treating International students and their needs in terms that are at best simplistic and, at worst, xeno-racist. For example, institutional processes from administration to research and teaching within the Internationalised university tend to rely on categorizing and labeling students in specific ways. The lexicon of "overseas students", "International students", "EU- student", "Home students", "non-native speakers", "native speakers" and so on contributes to what Collins (2018, 180), calls "[t]he hegemonic form of the intercultural". This hegemony, she

argues, has little concern for social justice. Framed in economic and essentialist terms, it serves only to interpellate students and reinforce a sense of authority and social distance by activity promoting hierarchies of national and psychological boundaries for economic gain. It is therefore not surprising that the morality of universities' admission procedures has been questioned (Weale 2019). As long as they are in a mode of competition, he believes, universities may be tempted to do anything, even if it is immoral, just to ensure their place in the global market.

Methodology

A desire to understand students' perceptions of such practices lies at the heart of this study. To develop an in-depth understanding of the issues by examining experiences, locally, in one institution, we undertook purposive sampling of students and staff from a post-1992 HEI in southern England (n=30). All participants had the experience of Internationalisation either as students or teachers, and once institutional approval for this approach had been obtained, we arranged semi-structured interviews. We asked participants, first, to describe their experience in the UK; second, to define Internationalization; third, to identify challenges, if any, of studying or working in an internationalised university; and finally, to suggest possible solutions to overcome those challenges. The transcribed narratives were read, manually coded, and finally categorized into broader thematic units.

To convey a sense of the overall picture while allowing in-depth analysis of individual experiences, this paper focuses on the accounts of just four participants. These students were enrolled in a PhD program and, while they do not represent the International cohort as a whole, we chose to focus on their views for two important reasons. First, as postgraduate students, they would have both experience and critical awareness of university life and practices.

This experience is not restricted to doctoral study: some of the cohorts had attended preparatory courses; others had done undergraduate qualifications in the UK. This led us to our second reason for this focus. The question of how to label postgraduate students with such diverse experiences also led us to question the term "International" students. Although initially aiming to identify and analyze this group, initial research quickly showed that the epithet is little more than an administrative label. Marginalizing experiences based on their use are common, whether the individual is "International" or not, and so decided to use it as sparingly as possible ourselves. It is at least possible, as our discussion of xeno-racism above shows, that all students feel, in some way, the effects of Internationalising narratives and practices which treat all students as quanta.

Data

In this paper, we focus on four student interviewees, whose names and data have all been carefully anonymized. *Katia* is a full-time first-year PhD student studying Media and Cultural Studies. She is fully funded by her home government that granted her a 3-year scholarship for a PhD degree in the UK. *Lisa* started her journey in the UK as part of a 6-month pre-sessional program or what is known as PhD preparatory programme leading to a PhD in Applied Linguistics. *Jane* is a post-PhD student with a four-year degree in Business studies and digital communications from a UK university. She currently researches Equality, Diversity, and Inclusive (EDI) policies, including a focus on migration groups and student attainment gaps. While technically a UK student, her experiences underline some of the problematic assumptions about racial narratives and internationalization that this paper discusses. *Bima,* finally, is a second-year PhD student from the faculty of Applied Linguistics, also sponsored by her home government.

Since the issues in question were both sensitive and personal, trust-building was fundamental. Our multilingualism proved helpful in this respect, allowing us to respond effectively to the high level of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the cohort by, for instance, switching codes and languages in the interviews themselves when this was appropriate. In an attempt to avoid the kinds of reductive essentialism mentioned above, we have also taken the decision here to avoid identifying the participants – and ourselves - according to predetermined racialized identities. Our critique of such reductivism challenges the negative consequences of such practices by associating them with precisely the kind of limiting identity narratives criticized below.

This approach produced a large amount of rich data, which we analyzed initially by focussing on the extent to which it reflected the critical issues mentioned above. Specifically, we looked for instances of perceived discrimination and how the interviewees articulated critical themes related to the discourse and practices of Internationalisation. We were keen to avoid referring to specific institutional problems so that the research would not resemble a "student voice" capturing exercise. Rather than concentrate on complaints of an individual or purely local nature, we looked instead for evidence of wider lessons beyond the particular institution where the data was collected.

We will present this data in two parts. First, we focus on our interviewees' views on Internationalisation and their perceptions of its discourses and practices. Second, we highlight our interviewees' statements specifically about discriminatory practices in this context.

Internationalization and angelism

It was clear that, for our interviewees, life in UKHE is extremely challenging and very different from the angelistic experience they had expected. Lisa, for example, echoed the respondents to the EHRC report who found the student

experience scary and isolating. Everything, she said, is "terrifying" and being alone means "fighting to live".

Strikingly, however, Lisa quickly identified these feelings of isolation with the sense of precarity and intrinsic worthlessness created by the financial imperatives of Internationalization:

> *if we talk about internationalisation the way they portray it, internationalisation is a big door to be opened to different people from different countries to be supported, to be provided with good services, but all in all, no country accepts foreigners if there is no benefit from them. That's my belief. For instance, at any time, if my government stops funding my research or my study, I would directly get home. There is no discussion. Nobody would care about the worth of my research or my efforts. That's internationalisation.*

It is worth stressing that Lisa highlights precarity, stressing a key attribute of the xeno-racially designated Other. Katia also felt that International students' interests were disregarded and existed "just to fit their interests, not ours". Bima was even more critical, arguing that internationalisation was based on "fake" and "non-real" reasons. Instead of making students open to the outside world, she said, "the true reason is to absorb our money". For Jane, universities understand internationalization only "from a very monetary point of view". But she also questioned universities' desire to work differently:

> *I don't think they really want to create this breadth of cultural exchange or inviting people to the same space as you. I think they just view it as a good way to make money and make universities look good*

She added that for HEIs, International students are "easy money". The problem is that it "meets the needs of the Institution [but] I don't think, it meets the needs of students." Only by constructing an angelistic narrative of the student

experience can the institution reconcile this disparity. This is why the question of expectations and the *image* of provision, as perceived by our interviewees, raises troubling questions. As Katia points out, expectations are high, reflecting perhaps the drive, mentioned above, to promote the "excellence" of the UK's "gold standard" provision. In particular, Katia compared the HEI online image with the reality of studying there:

> *I first thought that Oh! It's a British university, and they are all successful universities and so on, but when I came here, I think that the information provided on the website are not the same as you are here, and you see with your own eyes. It's something different.*

For Katia, the image presented is idealistic and the reality, perhaps unsurprisingly, "not always that perfect". Bima, too, felt that her expectations of a friendly, open institution had been raised and dashed, and "nothing happened like this". This disappointment came from the feeling that the reality is not just less than ideal, but a disorganized mess which, for Jane, belied the falsehood of the "perfect image" drawn by the institution:

> *I think, they should be more organised. I feel like it's a mess… It's just quite disappointing because at the website they try to draw this perfect image about the university, but when you are here, you see the reality with your own eyes*

This disparity between the perfect image and the messy reality of provision is significant and unflattering. Like Jane, Bima also criticized the way sessions seemed poorly described and managed. While "[s]ome subjects were good enough" she felt that "others were really a disappointment for me". In general, her expectation that provision would be systematized, organized, and of high quality was not met. "You can feel the gap," she said.

Our interviewees' expectations were uniformly high, but it is striking that they were linked to the image given by the institution and the gap it created between expectations and reality. It seems clear that the rhetoric of "gold standard" provision and "excellence" raised above is echoed in students' desires and expectations about provision. Like Katia, who felt that the online image and reality were out of step, Lisa thought that studying would be "like a paradise" with "all the things that I've dreamed of".

At face value, this seems unrealistic, but it takes a different turn when Lisa describes how the situation was made clear to her during application by a lecturer who said:

> *Don't worry of not getting offers because everybody will get accepted because we see you as dollars, and then I was shocked of having heard that. (…) He said: "just put in the emails you send "fully funded by the government", and you will be accepted".*

Lisa also reported a similar level of candor about the institution's motivations from another lecturer who told her that "this [provision] is all nonsense" because "this university is just good at sticking papers on the walls and making announcements, and that's it". The point here is that students like Lisa can see that their instrumentalization goes beyond simply recruitment and up-front funding, crucial though both are. As highlighted above, Internationalisation is inseparable from the creation and management of (a) positive image(s) and sloganising: "sticking papers on the walls and making announcements". This is why Jane feels that on university websites – she referred to more than one – "every post on Brexit or Immigrations or asylum seekers are all wearing white wings… It's like very white winged". This is surely a telling comment: it pithily describes the angelism of institutions' self-image of a gold-standard excellence

and its conations, outlined above, which is out of step with less attractive realities.

That institutions should resort to such angelism in times of stiff competition and financial stricture is perhaps integral to the high-stakes reality of Internationalisation. But it is worrying when, as we see below, students perceive such angelism as a reflection of a culture that veers from commodification and essentialisation of the student cohort towards forms of actual discrimination to the extent reported by the EHRC, above.

Discrimination and xeno-racism

It is therefore unsurprising that examples of more or less overt discrimination arise in our participants' accounts. Our interviewees reported a range of behaviors and attitudes which bear out the EHRC's conclusions. For Katia "[w]e always felt inferior inside the classroom" and "[t]he way they treat us makes us feel so inferior".[ii] Katia was keen not to condemn everyone in the institution, but felt that many did effectively marginalize students and "underestimate our potential". Similar feelings were evoked by Bima, who felt angry "because we are treated like aliens − people from another planet (…) we are lesser than them". She felt isolated, separated, and marginalized from other (British) PhD students.

Bima also felt left out academically, a form of which isolation left her feeling that "I don't have the right knowledge". Since joining the institution, "nothing developed concerning knowledge", leaving her feeling disappointed, isolated, and "like I have an empty head".

Further criticism of practice came from Jane, who reported frequently dealing with others' false assumptions about her nationality and ethnic origin:

> *I've had a lot of people thinking that I'm foreign just because I'm black. I had a lot of experiences when people were shocked that I speak very well and that I was so engaged in things.*

For Jane, there are always "race perceptions", albeit subconsciously. People act "like I wasn't born here" and are "just very dismissive". This was true of "most of our teaching", she said, which was "very Eurocentric and white dominated". Case studies, for example, are predominantly set in European countries and references to transnational activity are limited. Only one example, from an assessment, concerned a comparison between France and the UK where "you're not really comparing much because there were so many similarities". Such teaching "doesn't engage me as a person", Jane said.

These perceptions reflect all-too-familiar racist tropes and, for Jane, a lack of awareness among university staff that BAME students have had to fight to get access to these "predominantly white dominated spaces". Being told to go back to her own country, Jane does not understand why she is expected to be the same as the white majority. Thus, for Jane, one of the main difficulties has been finding "black spaces" where she can feel more comfortable:

> *my difficulty is around race. I think a very common thing when you come to a predominantly white area, you always notice yourself more. So, you're always… like the talking or the one person in the room and when everyone else has a different mindset to you, you have no one to share your views with and bounce back and forth and that's quite difficult*

She felt that over time she began to notice that "some people smile at you with fake smile". Black students, who are expected to be disengaged and distracted, are therefore not entitled to the same levels of support as their white counterparts. This leads to dismissive attitudes among staff, inequality of

opportunity, and the need to fight for support, she said. On one hand, she felt that this was linked to the fact she wears a veil in a town with few Muslim students. More specifically though, she felt that the veil was a signifier for financial gain: "whenever they see the veil, they smell the presence of international students". The alterity of the student, perceived as a commodity, bears the marks of a very specific kind of discriminatory narration, tying angelism to xeno-racism.

The hypo-text: from Internationalisation to xeno-racism

We have seen that many of the behaviours and attitudes reported by the EHRC are reflected in the experiences of the students in this study, who seem very lucid about these examples of discrimination and their source. Students clearly identify internationalisation with disappointment based on angelistic images of high-quality provision. They understand that their academic and personal value comes far behind that of the self-interested monetary and reputational value that they represent.

Our analysis highlights these "narratives of the other" (McCoy, 2018, 16). Although less tangible, these attributes demand our attention in these troubling times. While controversial, this has allowed, even encouraged, us to look deeper into the construction of discriminatory narratives. Cheran (2001, 2) argues that these reflect a dominant culture of economic viability and an emerging "control regime" which intersects race with a much broader narrative of identity, gender, and criminality – corroborated by Catalano, above for instance. For Varvin (2017), they stem from a sense of the psychoanalytic 'unheimlich', expressing a profound fear of anything constructed as Other. For Boeyink (2019), colonial attitudes and their attendant biopolitical[iii] fears ground the development of this fear of alterity and a need to find new terms such xeno-racism as to critique these new forms of discrimination.

In our view, the extent to which this triumvirate of self-preservation, self-interest, and self-image may risk undermining UKHE's attempt to stamp out racism is a key issue. Our data highlights students' criticisms of the institution's projection of an attractive, often idealistic, self-image to the market. International students, who often feel "unwelcome, isolated and vulnerable", believe they are "only wanted by universities for the fees they bring" (EHRC 2019, 28). High-quality services, ostentatious facilities, and tempting opportunities for students are certainly touted to inflect students' choices. But the sophisticated media which mask self-preservation, self-interest, and self-image are highlighted by our participants as linked to the processes which allow racism to go unchecked on campus.

In their defense, institutions generally "ha[ve] been taking steps to better understand the harassment that goes on", according to the report (EHRC 2019, 5). Indeed, their task is not easy when discrimination is less overt: so-called "micro-aggressions", for example, are often "subtle and insidious" and leave their victim "confused, distressed and frustrated" (EHRC 2019, 24. see also Advance HE 2019b). Moreover, micro-aggressors can themselves be "oblivious of the offense they have caused" (sic) (EHRC 2019, 24). Recommendations include the reinforcement of processes of advice and advocacy. Mediators, acting as "listening ears" (sic) for instance, working as points of neutral contact between victim and institution would in theory improve the processing of incidents (EHRC 2019, 54-55).

This focus on process is a familiar feature of educational managerialism which leads to the majority of universities not seeking feedback on their processes for dealing with such cases (EHRC 2019, 10). Rather than foster participation, openness, and effective action against racism, process-tinkering, and data-farming are advocated (EHRC 2019, 88-90). The primacy of these processes,

and the financial and reputational issues at stake in their maintenance, help show why some institutions might be reticent about really tackling racism. Indeed, as the EHRC points out, HEIs can avoid action by watering down complaints and undermining the results of internal inquiries and tribunals to avoid any liability which could damage their international reputation, brand, and marketing strategy (EHRC 2019, 83). Moreover, afraid to breach data protection rules, some HEIs demonstrate a "lack of meaningful enforcement" by failing to inform the complainant about their management of these issues (EHRC 2019, 10-11). Indeed, a university might decide that the potential damage to the image and financial costs of overtly tackling racism might "outweigh the potential positive effect of the measure under consideration" and distorts the organization's ability to reach its own goals (EHRC 2019, 81 and 84).

Our analysis also highlights this sharp contrast between institutional culture and that of the students. The former's tendency to homogenize is perceived as in conflict with the latter's heterogeneity. This leads to a lack of responsiveness to need but also seems to reflect a hypo-text expressed by attitudes and behaviors of discrimination, marginalization, and racist abuse. Our interviewees' experiences demand that we ask how far the institution's deep hypo-textual investment in existing processes of angelistic branding and self-promotion collaborate with xeno-racism on campus.

Conclusion

Racism in UKHE involves an inability to recognize to discrimination in favor of the demands of commodification and marketing in HE. For some, it reflects a specifically western model of internationalization whose "social imaginary" has a "differential valuation of humanity" (Pražić and Indelicato 2019, 296 see also Thomas 2019). This imaginary thrives on ambiguity: its angelism presents the

participants of HE as ideal citizens of an ideal academic universe, while its xeno-racism constructs them as pieces on the economic chessboard of internationalized HE.

But to what extent do xeno-racism and angelism add to an already powerful lexicon of xenophobia, racism, and consumerism as critical tools in HE? If nothing else, they draw our attention to three aspects of the current situation and help voice specific issues raised by our interviewees. First, the link between Internationalization and discriminatory practices has been highlighted. While the EHRC report brushes over this connection, which cannot be made if we limited our understanding of racism to its traditional markers, developing an awareness of xeno-racism allows us to critique a wider, deeper cultural problem. Second, xeno-racism helps us interrogate specific narratives about HE and its participants. Rather than assume that racism pre-exists its manifestations, it focuses attention on the narrative construction of specific identities and their inherent limitations. Third, and finally, this analysis underscores the fact that discrimination is both wide and deep: unrestricted by visible markers of difference, xeno-racism facilitates the reification and commodification of students for financial and reputational advantage. This is angelism at its most ambivalent and transparent: that the imaginary of internationalization should actualize such a hypo-text of self-interest comes as no surprise.

Neither angelism nor xeno-racism is inevitable, however. Situated as they are in specific practices, discourses, and attitudes, there is no reason why other approaches to Internationalisation should not be possible. But this does mean taking our students' experiences seriously and goes beyond the development of more processes, as the EHRC seems to suggest. On this view, HEIs are implicated in a form of internationalisation that undermines their ability to tackle racism as an ethical imperative, leading to angelistic and xeno-racist

treatment of the edu-masses. As Bhopal and Henderson (2019, 4) remind us, the usual strategies of 'tick box' change are unlikely to work in this white-winged world.

Notes

i See Merriam Webster (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/angelism). For further discussion of the pernicious nature of such idealism in education contexts, see Author 1 (2016). Here and elsewhere such hyperbole serves to establish a very specific narrative: hierarchical relations of superiority and inferiority exist where excellence is posited. Derived via the Old French (*excellent* - "outstanding, excellent") from the Latin *excellentem* ("towering, prominent, distinguished, superior, surpassing,"), it compounds *ex* ("out from") and *cellere* ("to rise high, tower) and is related to *celsus* ("high, lofty, great,"). It is the connotation that Goodness is derived from On High and bestowed on those below which initiates and perpetuates these relations.

ii See note 1, above.

iii Biopolitics is a term coined by Foucault to describe the way post-colonial societies, rather than exploit the demographic and economic resources of colonised peoples, have turned inwards to exploit the immanent forces of life in their own populations. Life itself can no longer be defined as (purely) biological, but rather as the focus and the outcome of political strategies and technologies (see Foucault, 1976a;1976b).

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