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Beyond BAME: Rethinking the politics, construction, application, and efficacy of ethnic categorization.

Stimulus Paper

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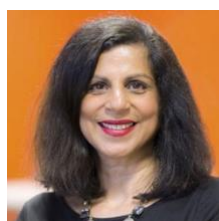
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Forward – Nona McDuff

Over the thirty years I have advocated for race equity in higher education, I have welcomed the regularly revisited use of the terms we use to describe people and address to address the differentials in their experiences and outcomes. It shows that we, in this very influential sector, are constantly challenging ourselves on whether the language we use helps to fight inequalities or whether it maintains a mindset that problematises ethnic minorities and perpetuates the conditions imposed by domination and discrimination.

When I speak about the awarding gap, I do want to highlight that there are persistent differentials for most ethnic minority groups but that the differential is the largest for students who identify as Black. To be able to do this I rely on people ticking the relevant box so that I can use the data to shine a light on inequities and robustly demand change at individual, institution, and sector levels. But I also know that counting and categorisation is a double-edged sword – yes it can be used to clear the way for social justice but on the other hand it can be used to cut a path for 'othering' and judgements about worth or provide a justification for inequalities.

At a recent event I was asked about language and whether there was a more appropriate term for BME or BAME that the sector could agree on and I replied that in my opinion there wasn't. I have read that as humans we like to categorise and label – it is a social activity we are comfortable with but that is at odds when we feel the label is problematic or offensive. From my own experience, my reaction to the labels used to describe me has changed considering the evolving context and the political environment. When I was younger, I referred to myself as politically black to demonstrate my allegiance to the anti-racist movement – it was a term which my ethnic minority friends related to and we were quite comfortable with that.

When I started using the term BME/BAME it helped me to fight discrimination and to shine a light on inequalities and how they manifest themselves from micro to macro actions. More recently I began to refer to myself as a person of colour because I am proud to be one but bizarrely also it is the source of discrimination or prejudice that I face. I am at times tempted to say what is this BAME nonsense – just call me an Indian after all I am an immigrant who was born in Liberia, spend a few years in India and then moved to live in Britain. But as a practitioner, I worry that by such splintering I am diluting the power of the whole group of ethnic minorities to keep eyes on the prize – race equity, respect, and recognition.

When I speak to the White people in my life, I know they don't have such conversations or concerns, and I am envious. Like them, I would like just to be. However, the killing of George Floyd and others in 2020 has reinvigorate the debate about the inherent problems of using or not using terms to describe us and this is welcomed by me.

So, I think this paper is timely because institutions and sector agencies are aware that a generic term is not helpful and are seeking an alternative. The paper takes us on a journey which helps us: to understand why we categorise, to understand the problems associated with categorisation and offers the pros and cons of using different terms. I hope that you will find this paper informative and helpful whilst remembering all along that the beauty of our diverse human body is that one size will never fit all.

Introduction

Though the issues of 'race', ethnicity and discrimination are not new to UK Higher Education, institutional and sector-wide attention to the challenge of racism is. Specifically, attention to such things as 'ethnic disparities in degree-awarding', the lack of non-white staff, especially at senior levels, and racial harassment, is relatively recent. Because of events related to the killing of George Floyd in the US in 2020, and the ongoing staff   and student activism related to *#BlackLivesMatter movement, 'why is my professor not black?', 'decolonise the curriculum'*, there has been a marked shift in the stance taken by regulatory bodies, such as the Office for Students, on questions of 'race' discrimination in Higher Education. We are now seeing a much more systematic and detailed examination of inequities associated with 'race' and racism across the HE sectors, and this has resulted in mounting evidence of systematic institutional discrimination (See, for example, Arday and Mirza, 2019; Tate and Bagguley, 2018; Sian, 2019; Pilkington, 2011).

Along with shining a light on racism, though coming from different perspectives, there has also been a questioning of the frameworks that are deployed to identify groups that are subject to discrimination, with the acronym BAME ('Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic') coming in for particular criticism. For instance, one of the centrepieces of the *Commission report on Race and Ethnic Disparities Report* (Sewell, 2021), commissioned by the Government in response to widespread protests in aftermath of the George Floyd killing*,* is a recommendation that 'BAME' should be 'dropped' in official government research reports. The commissioners argue that the monolithic nature of the acronym BAME is both demeaning to non-white communities and it masks 'significant differences in outcomes between ethnic groups.' (2021, 33). Whilst recognising that the BAME category has little value in understanding the granularity of people's lived experience, this begs the question, if one is to discard the BAME category, what does one replace it with? And perhaps, even more critically, what will be the

consequences for anti-racist struggle where there is no conceptual basis for collectivising the experiences of non-white populations?

Accordingly, this discussion paper seeks to do two things. First, it offers a critical commentary on the historical and contemporary politics of counting and categorisation, especially in the context of Empire, colonialism, and the development of the modern multicultural ethnic societies. And second, it examines the debate surrounding the efficacy of the BAME category and possible alternatives. Our aim is not to be prescriptive about alternatives to the BAME category, but to inform the ongoing debate and struggle for a suitable alternative mechanism for capturing the collective experiences of racism.

Why do we categorise?

There is a saying *'if you are not counted, you don't count'*. This sounds like a simple, common-sense fact, but it betrays several problems, both with the emphasis on 'counting' but also, the framing of the categories for counting and, perhaps, most worryingly, the implication that being 'counted' will necessarily result in some positive outcomes.

Many countries around the world categorise their inhabitants by 'race', ethnicity, and/or national origins, but how and for what purposes such data is collected can vary considerably.

Rallu et al. (2004) suggest there are four broad types of governmental approach to ethnic monitoring of population groups: enumeration for political control (*compter pour dominer*); non-enumeration in the name of national integration (*ne pas compter au nom de l'intégration nationale*); discourse of national hybridity (*compter ou ne pas compter au nom de la mixité*); and enumeration for anti-discrimination (compter pour justifier l'action positive).

The first category is associated with colonial census administration, as well as related examples such as apartheid-era South Africa, the Soviet Union, and Rwanda. In these cases, ethnic categories form the basis for exclusionary policies. Indeed, as Farrel (2016) notes, though today we take counting of citizens, through a plethora of form filling, for granted, this was not always the case. Indeed, before the modern colonial era, there was no word for 'population' and no agreement that monarchs should count their subjects. Furthermore, before 1801 there was no national census, and nobody knew the size of Britain's population. In his book *The Truth About Us: The Politics of Information from Manu to Modi,* Chakravorty (2019) discusses how the social categories of religion and caste were developed during the British colonial rule, at a time when information was scarce and the coloniser's power over information was absolute. Indeed, even the formal classification of indigenous Indian religions (Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism), and castes was done by British Scholars through their "reading" of what they deemed to be India's definitive texts.

In the second category, characteristic of policies pursued in France, Germany, and Spain, there is an affirmative refusal to establish, and thus monitor populations according to ethnic categories. Broadly speaking, in these instances, the justification for the non-monitoring of 'race', ethnicity, religion, or other markers of difference, other than immigration status, is based on the idea that the state should interact with the individual only as citizens who share equal rights and not as communities or groups. In total contrast to the UK, in these countries, the separating of people into different groups would be racist and counter to the process of national integration. Given the experience and legacies of the Nazi era and the horrors of 'race science', one can understand the source of their reasoning. However, the refusal to recognise ethnic diversification and hence and targeted measures for ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups does in effect render minorities invisible and vulnerable to systemic forms of discrimination. These issues can be seen in the media debates that surrounded President Macron's pledge to remove the term 'race' from the French

constitution (Sage, 2018). Indeed, though not expressed in such explicit ways, the recommendation in the *Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities Report* (2021) that the term BAME should be replaced in favour of a more generic category of 'ethnic minority' also reflects this trend towards what might be termed as a 'post-racial' moment.

> **Too many people in the progressive and anti-racism movements seem reluctant to acknowledge their own past achievements, and they offer solutions based on the binary divides of the past which often misses the point of today's world. (Sewell, 2021:233)**

The third category is largely associated with Latin American countries, where governments historically say racial/ ethnic diversity is an integral part of pervasive hybridity within a national identity. However, influenced by developments surrounding affirmative action policies in U.S. universities in the 1970s, as well as the black civil rights movement in the north, countries like Brazil, reluctantly began to formalise racial and ethnic monitoring. Reluctantly because, such policies collided head-on with a defining feature of Brazilian identity, which for much of the twentieth century was based on the idea that Brazil was a "racial democracy". However, as Oliveira (2017) notes, this was tantamount to a romantic myth that masked deep levels of racial discrimination:

> **As the country's black activist groups have argued for decades, it is also a myth. Brazil's horrific history of slavery — 5.5 million Africans were forcibly transported to Brazil, in comparison with the just under 500,000 brought to America — and its present-day legacy demanded legal recognition, they said. And almost two decades ago, these activists started to get their way in the form of race-based quotas at universities.**

The final category is characteristic of policies pursued by anglophone countries, most significantly, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, where 'racial' and ethnic census

data serve as tools in combating discrimination. To give some sense of the complexity of ethnic monitoring, it is worth considering that at the 2020 US census there were over 80 distinct ethnic categories, headed under 5 broad categories of 'White, 'Black or African American', American Indian or Alaska Native', Asian and Pacific Islanders. (For a detailed breakdown see: https://2020census.gov/en/about-questions/2020-census-questions-race.htm). We see a similar though less differentiated breakdown within the UK Census of 2021.

Problems with categorising and labelling

Though collective identification or what the sociologist John Rex (1996) termed 'ethnic mobilisation' can be a source of political power, as discussed above, it is important to note there are many problems with both the construction of categories and their application. And so, across the world, we can see any number of terms employed to categorise people, associated with 'race', caste, ethnic origin, religion, language, nationality, ancestry, country of birth, tribe, social status, indignity and so on. As Morning (2008) points out, a further complication is how the meanings of these terms may differ across time and place:

> **what is called "race" in one country might be labelled "ethnicity" in another, while "nationality" means ancestry in some contexts and citizenship in others. Even within the same country, one term can take on several connotations, or several terms may be used interchangeably.**

Along with the issue of definition, another important consideration is one of consent, legitimacy, and efficacy. Who, for example, decides the label and do citizens have a choice to refuse them? Farkas (2017) suggests 'Some people argue that this data collection essentialises ethnic groups or contributes to race discrimination. Others are concerned that migration, language, education level and

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poverty data are not effective proxies for measuring discrimination based on racial and ethnic origin.'

Counting and categorisation is a double-edged sword; as well as offering a basis for 'ethnic pride' and national identification, we know that such markers of difference, through processes of 'othering', have acted as a proxy for determining moral worth, superiority/inferiority, and belonging/non-belonging. Whereas the former deployment of ethnic differentiation has been driven by a desire to promote equality and social justice, the latter use has served as a tool for the justification of inequality, racism, 'ethnic cleansing' and genocide.

Ethnic markers are not universally applied; some people or groups are deemed as the natural inhabitants of specific spaces and apparently do not need to be assigned a label, whereas others, deemed to be outsiders or 'space invaders' (Puwar, 2004) have to be labelled or categorised into a box. A key question is whether the process of labelling denies some people or groups their existence in social space or offers them a sense of uniqueness. In this regard, one is reminded of the basic human desire to both be different but not so different that this may result in being targeted, in the case of racist violence.

In a stinging assault on the terms 'BAME' (and 'People of Colour'), anti-racist educationalist, Prof Gus John has recently argued that in developing ways of categorising people, we need to do so on a much firmer footing linked to ancestry, rather than the labels policymakers construct, perhaps for their convenience rather than to seriously address the impacts of racial oppression.

> **"We have a duty to disrupt the hegemony of that language and its power to racialise, marginalise and exclude. For one thing, young Black British people such as my children and grandchildren need a home. They need to see themselves as being the continuum of an Ancestral line, as having African ancestry. As I keep telling my children and grandchildren, Britain is where**

they live, but it can never be their 'home'. Their 'Mother country' is Africa. While we believe in people's right to self-identify and that therefore, Caribbean people have a right to declare that they are not African or Asian, or British for that matter, we would all consider it rather bizarre if they all started calling themselves Innuits. We might be from the Caribbean, but we are NOT Caribs, or Arawaks, or Mayans. That is not our Ancestry. Our Ancestry did not begin when we were forcibly rammed into the hold of slave ships and transported to the West Indies in chains and shackles."
(John, 2021)

John's comments might be understood as an appeal to the strategic necessity of identities that can disrupt and expose the colonial logics that underly ethnic categorisation. As such, the notion of identity he puts forward provide what St Louis (2009: 565) calls "narrative accounts for peoples' arrival at the present through a past that is imaginatively reconstructed and dramatized." While recognising that such historically-rooted identities are strategically necessary, Stuart Hall argues that 'identity is not in the past to be found but in the future to be constructed' (Hall, 1995 in St Louis, 2009: 567).

This thinking can be seen in Hall's (1996) essay *New Ethnicities,* which sets out the emergence of a new front in anti-racist struggle in Britain while pointing out the dangers inherent in this rejection of old 'certainties'. Hall characterises 'old ethnicities' as involving an understanding of the category 'black' as an organising category forged in the common experience of racism and marginalisation by groups with very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities in post-war Britain. He explains that this came to form a cultural politics of resistance to the othering of black subjects as objects rather than subjects of representation in culture. By invoking the slogan 'black is beautiful', the Black Power Movement in the US sought to reclaim and rehabilitate the term 'black' as a key category of an organised practice of struggles based

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on building black resistance and new kinds of black consciousness and self-pride (Anthias & Yuval-Davies, 1992).

Black Political Identity and 'BAME'

Inspired by developments in the US, anti-racists in the UK adopted the label Black, though the development of a collective black political consciousness in Britain had different roots. The term symbolised the emergence of what Sivanandan (1990) terms 'communities of resistance', where Asian and Afro-Caribbean migrants collectivised around a common struggle against white racism, both within society at large and within its many institutions (Sivanandan, 1990, 1991). Brah (1996) offers a slightly different perspective in suggesting that the term 'black' emerged as a political challenge, by activists from Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities, to the colonial description of them as 'coloured' people, which they found insulting. The colonial code was now being 're-worked and re-constituted in a variety of political, cultural and economic processes in post-war Britain' (Brah, 1996, p. 127).

Some of the criticisms aimed at the label 'BAME' resemble earlier criticisms of the label 'black', namely, that "non-white" groups were much more differentiated than the term implied, and that it was anachronistic because, as suggested by Gus John above, for subsequent generations, particularly of British born 'black' people, their collective memory was no longer only rooted in the experience of slavery, colonialism, and empire,. Moreover, uncannily resembling the criticisms made by the *Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report* (2021) referred to earlier, the label Black tended to obscure or even silence racism amongst black groups and/or refuse to acknowledge their differential experiences of racism. Moreover, it was argued that given the point of the concept was to bring different radicalised groups/people together, it inevitably obscured the granularity of lived experience and, as an instrument for collecting data is too blunt, especially concerning the

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targeting of interventions and allocation of resources (see Modood et al., 1994).

Although some people might claim that a unifying label could become hegemonic over ethnic identities, it is worth pointing out that ascribed labels or markers of identity in a system of racial classification already deny some groups agency or assign them an inferior position. However, forging a collective identity without acknowledging differences or working to overcome divisions, would not work to challenge White supremacy. In the struggle for recognition and legitimate space, the colonial policy of divide and rule would stoke the flames of imagined superiority of groups over other groups. For instance, Ahluwalia and Zegeye (2003) observe that undercurrents of racism have crept into the politics of unity that held during the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, with some "coloureds" distancing themselves from the Blacks. They point out that during the apartheid regime some people considered "coloureds" had refused to accept that label and chose to align themselves with the category Black and as part of a unified front against a racist regime.

Similarly, in the UK, resisting the super-imposed labels that set people apart, would call for the forging of solidarity across racially constructed divisions. The consequence of not managing to build solidarity amongst different communities against ongoing white racism, albeit more nuanced perhaps, would result in a real fear that oppressed minorities may end up blaming and/or competing rather than confronting the system that functions to reproduce racial dipartites. Hall's *New Ethnicities* paradigm reflected a move from a 'struggle over the relations of representation to a politics of representation itself' (1996:442) in which cultural representation was understood to play not merely expressive but formative role in the constitution of social and political life. However, recognising the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities of 'non-white' people constitutes one side of the coin of representation, there is still the political necessity to forge solidarity through overarching categories, such as black. In

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this regard, the term 'black' was never designed to articulate a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories (Hall, 1996b:443), but a political and strategic necessity.

Critiques of BAME

It is in the context of these critiques that the origins of the term Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) which then morphed into Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) can be traced. Alexander (2018: 1041) notes the splintering of fraught political alliances 'around the term 'black' from the mid-1980s onwards, informed, partly, by what she terms 'the resurgence of culture and ethnicity under the auspices of state-sponsored multiculturalism.' As early as the 1970s, according to Professor Ted Cantle, who chaired the government's review of community cohesion in 2001, different ethnic groups used the term BME/BAME to fight back against discrimination.

It emerges in some senses as a critique of the term 'black', which had become widely used by anti-racists in framing the experience of racist oppression. However, its widespread adoption in policy has drawn attention to its limitations. For instant, Gabriel, argues that 'BAME' effectively homogenises minoritized populations which has three effects: reproducing 'unequal power relations', masking inequalities as they are experienced by different racialised ethnic groups, and, since 'White' is never named as an identity, reinforcing the privilege of White identity.

Prior to the publication of the *Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report (2021)* which, as pointed out earlier, has called for the abolition of the term, 'BAME' was the default term typically used in the UK by the government, companies, and organizations to refer collectively to diversity levels or about staff who are not white. The central problem with the term BAME is that, though it is, and always was, intended to be an acronym to refer collectively to staff

and students who are not white, it is often misused as a noun, as in 'our BAME students'. It is also argued that the acronym is redundant, inaccurate and neglects the diversity, humanity and lived experience of those from ethnic minority backgrounds. In the same way as using 'people of colour' as a catch-all, 'BAME' is used to describe those with African, Caribbean, South Asian, Eastern Asian or any number of different heritages.

Though perhaps unintentional, the casual deployment of the acronym BAME can end up erasing identity whilst simultaneously perpetuating 'othering' and even layering new stereotypes and pathologies over existing ones in associating 'BAME people' with deficits, as in the case of the discourse surrounding COVID 19 infection rates, or, in the case of Higher Education, attainment gaps or over-representation in academic dishonesty cases. The result is that policy discourse and notions of identity generated by this framing have been criticized for constructing students of colour as deficient (Bhopal & Pitkin, 2020:543) and reifying them as racial others who are the embodiment of social problems (St Louis 2009:568).

As well as problems with accuracy, some argue that it is a complete misnomer to associate people described as coming from a 'Black' or 'Asian' background as belonging to a 'minority', when, it is obvious, this is not the case if one takes a more global perspective. Given the changing and contested nature of identity enumeration, the debate concerning the construction of categories of difference cannot be separated from broader socio-cultural mechanisms. In a piece in the Independent 5th Sept 2020, headed "if you're serious about anti-racism, you need to stop using the term 'BAME', Amanda Parker argued that labelling someone a "minority", can impact their self-esteem.

> **"To bring about systemic and lasting change, we need to be able to relate to the hopes, needs, desires of those requiring that change to happen. The simultaneous erasure of identity and "othering" that takes place when someone is called BAME does nothing**

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> **to build a sense of common purpose – instead, it may potentially impede our progress in working towards an inclusive and equitable society."**

To build a sense of common purpose, as Parker (2020) proposes, and to heed the call made by Erasmus, namely, to trouble 'the taken-for-granted idea that ... race categories remain administratively and analytically necessary' (2001, p.3) would require us to understand and challenge the labelling or classifying of people and groups in the modern British bureaucratic state.

The paradox of identity.

The category that arguably we can all agree on, though that has not always been the case, is that we are all human. So, the challenge is how can we engage with each other at the human level. This is not as easy as it may sound, and it is a position that liberals often adopt in their claim that they 'treat everybody the same', implying they do not see identity but universal humanity. In the Dialectics of Enlightenment, critical theorists, Adorno and Horkheimer note that 'Classification is a condition for cognition and not cognition itself; cognition in turn dispels classification' (1979, p. 220). In making this observation, they draw attention to a particular paradox which we face in making sense of the human experience. This is the need, on the one hand, to stabilise and generalise expressions of human difference by deploying categories, such as 'BAME', white, black, etc, yet, on the other, realising that such categories have little meaning at the level of individual human engagement (Singh, 2016)

Given the problematic history of ethnic categorisation discussed earlier, one might wonder, if indeed there is an acceptable solution to the inherent limitations in labelling populations, not least given the ongoing churn of human societies and the contingent nature of identity itself. Here, we would argue, the need to re-think the issue of labels and labelling is not about a mere semantic shift, but about

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a shift in how we think about people, groups, and humanity more generally. In seeking a way forward, we are mindful of avoiding hierarchical and racialised categorisation processes. And in this regard, as well as applying a wide range of academic insights into the human condition, one needs to be aware of who is affixing labels on whom, and whether people can create their own labels.

The work of Grada Kilomba is useful to understand the first issue; she considers labelling to be a form of everyday racism, whereby some groups are imprisoned as the subordinate "other" (2004, p.13). Kilomba also addresses the second issue; she makes a plea for Blacks or oppressed groups to describe their history instead of being described. Her message echoes bell hooks when she makes a case for us to define our reality and establish our own identities (hooks 1989 and 1990). What both Kilomba and hooks seem to be challenging is the ideological role of labelling, which serves to maintain relations of domination and discrimination (Thompson, 1984). In questioning the logic of racial categorization we would be confronting the ideology that is being disseminated through labels such as 'BAME', which place us in a subordinate position. Besides, our sense of being-in-the-world would no longer be linked to how others view us, such as the white gaze (Fanon, 1986).

Another aspect of labelling requires us to think about why we adopt some labels and not others? For instance, why is it that the label 'BME' or 'BAME' is widely used, but there is no label such as "WME" (White Majority Ethnic)? The use and acceptance of labels and the absence of other labels indicate that we tend to uncritically accept certain ways of thinking and categorising people. This unquestioning acceptance of labels is a form of what King (1991) describes as 'dysconsciousness' or an 'impaired consciousness'. Dysconsciousness is an 'uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given.' It seems that the use and spread of labels such as 'BAME' are not unconscious but indicative of an impaired mindset. These uncritical, common-sense understandings of the world are rooted in

hegemonic ideologies that erase relations of dominance and are unthinkingly reproduced in our everyday interactions.

An important starting point for devising a way out of this seeming paradox of how to count people is to recognise what Kanabana (2021, forthcoming) identifies as the role played by whiteness in producing, legitimising and stabilising categories of 'non-whiteness' (Kanabana, 2021 forthcoming). As Charles Mills (1997, in Kanabana, forthcoming) highlights, our social dispositions are determined by whiteness, not as a colour but as a power relation. However, whilst recognising the scale of the challenge, one is still left with the task of finding ways of naming racism and those affected by it. Given that 'Race' itself, as argued by Battacharyya (2018), is 'a mode of social categorisation that categorises with unpassable boundaries', we need to develop a radical new approach for discussing and recording human differences that are both able to capture differential lived experience of different ethnic groups, whilst simultaneously avoiding the re-inscription of the black/white racialised binary.

Alternatives to BAME

Humans are by our very nature social beings. We like to form groups and this simple process constitutes the basis for our sense of belonging, identification, and identity. In the contemporary world, overlaying these primitive psychological mechanisms is the role that the politics and economics of European colonialism has and continues to shape the way people are constructed. As Edward Said notes, though no human being is reducible to any singular identity, the European colonial imperial project 'consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or Black, or Western, or Oriental.' (1993, 336).

The important consideration here is to understand that, whilst nature may behind our need to form groups, the labelling of people and groups is not unconscious or innocent. As well as being an excuse to stereotype, pathologise, racialise and oppress groups designated as other, we also need to understand that labels deployed politically can be a great source of solidarity for oppressed peoples to collectivise against an assumed common struggle. In some senses, labels never really go way and by removing one set, such as 'BAME', at best one is merely opening the path for others to emerge, and at worse is to 'shift' a narrative, which, in the case with the *Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report (Sewell, 2021)* is to push the debate on racial disparities away from the lens of structural and institutional racism to an approach that is framed in terms of individual failure and achievement. Moreover, the commission recommends an approach that favours disaggregation for more granularity. While disaggregation of ethnic categories that make up 'BAME' or 'BME' framings overcomes the homogenizing tendencies and allows for more nuanced analysis, these sharper tools of analysis raise other questions. These include the problem of 'ethnic absolutism' (Gilroy, 1987:66) and the overestimation of internal homogeneity of disaggregated groups. Alexander (2018:1045), raises concerns around the splintering of interests at the expense of collective identity.

Moreover, the singling out of stable ethnic categories to describe educational disadvantage suffers from a lack of attention to the relationship of race/racialization to socioeconomic class noted by Rollock et al. (2014), and the dynamic processes by which discourses of race, class, religion, gender etc. intersect (or 'articulate', Hall, 1996b) to construct certain subject positions for students in the university. Just as the colonial origins and development of whiteness and contemporary racism are inseparable from the maintenance of hierarchical class relations (Virdee, 2019), the labelling, categorisation and monitoring of individuals produced by whiteness denies this contingency. While some efforts to address the awarding gap have sought to strip out class as a factor, they rely on an assumption that social class is experienced equally across

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racialized groups and across time and space (cf O'Connor et al. 2007: 543).

The limits of such assumptions are shown when we consider the example of a Black, Male, Middle-Class student, who on arrival at university is positioned as 'aggressive' and 'from the streets' (cf Rosino 2017:170; Meghji, 2018) despite his middle-class upbringing and calm disposition, experiences class differently to a white middle-class student. His racialized and classed identities are not independent variables that attach to him, they are produced and reproduced through interaction in and with the institutional setting of the university (Dixon-Smith, 2022 in preparation).

To avoid being prescriptive, we feel the only way forward is to encourage critical dialogue about the efficacy of alternatives to the 'BAME' category. Accordingly, in the table appendix 1 we have sought to capture the essence of some of the possible candidates, though we acknowledge this is not an exhaustive list. But to facilitate the process of critical dialogue, we have provided short summary of the various possible terms, as well as some of their pro's and con's.

Conclusion

In this paper we have sought to make sense of the current moment within the context of the UK of how experiences of racism are understood and how, on a collective level, people's experiences are conceptualised and measured. Though one should not dismiss the ongoing struggles of oppressed peoples for self-definition, there can little disagreement that European colonialism, the Atlantic slave trade, mercantile capitalism and what is ironically termed 'age of enlightenment' has shaped many of the ways in which we understand human diversity. Our language and culture are saturated with constructions of difference, some problematic, as in the case of scientific racism, and some not so. Our humanity is predicated on the knowledge that we are same at one level, but

also different at another, that we share both a commonality of experience, but that we also live unique lives that are divergent in some small or large way.

To suggest that we have made no progress in fighting racism is just as absurd as suggesting that, if not the world, in the UK, institutional or structural racism does not exist. One of the most important victories against racism over the past 100 years or so has been the discrediting of race science and the idea that some human beings or population groups are simply genetically superior to others. However, in the absence of conceptual frameworks that can enable us to see structural patterns to disadvantage and differential outcomes in such things as student admissions, retention, success, degree classification, and graduate earnings, there is a real danger that we may slip towards individualist, deficit models.

In a world where nations and national identities are almost constantly changing, and where, hybrid identities are becoming the norm, there is no reason to expect established categories for comparing different groups of people to be around forever. In the present moment, the acronym 'BAME' appears to have few supporters, and now that the British State is seemingly consigning it to the dustbin of social policy, given that all the evidence points to ongoing racial disparities, we do need to find new ways of capturing the lived experiences of those on the receiving end of racism, be it individual, cultural, or institutional. And so, in looking to formulate new categories, it is worth heeding the advice of St Louis (2009:579) who suggests that 'the task is to approach the affective dimension of identification - the sentient, visceral and immediate experience of marginality, oppression and resistance - as evincing political relationships.'

Appendix 1- Alternatives to BAME: pros and cons.

Racialised, minoritised, racially minoritised.

Pros

Rather than positioning racialised groups and individuals as minorities, these terms foreground racialised categorisation processes. As such, they serve to highlight the fact that race is socially constructed and (re)produced through such processes. This focus on process perhaps goes some way to addressing framings of racial inequality in education that reify those people that are subject to injustice as 'racial Others [who are] the pathological embodiment of social and racial problems' (St. Louis, 2009). Moreover, by drawing attention to the mechanisms of exclusion, namely racialisation, one can firmly keep the focus on the power of whiteness.

Cons

These could be seen as passive descriptions which suggest a lack of agency. They define people by what is done to them rather than providing an affirmative sense of identity and/or solidarity.

The use of 'racialized' as a reference to largely non-white populations might be seen to situate white people as a social collective outside of race rather than as key beneficiaries of it (cf Lewis, 2004). The terms racialized as BAME, and/or 'racially minoritized' perhaps, addresses this point by drawing attention to the process of categorisation without necessarily excluding white beneficiaries from processes of racialisation.

Global majority

Pros

This framing acts as a corrective and a reminder that global majorities are racially minoritized in institutional contexts in the UK. As such, it fosters a more positive sense of self-identification and solidarity with those involved in anti-racist struggle globally.

As Professor Gus John (2020) explains, we have a duty to disrupt the hegemony of that language and its power to racialise, marginalise and exclude. He rejects the label 'BAME' or 'PoC' and uses the term Global Majority /Majorities 'to reclaim the centrality of Africa as a source of all life, no matter our colour. It creates a majority consciousness of the role we have played in the world. It reminds us that we are in the majority.' Psychologically it nurtures sense of wellbeing in this racist society to define oppressed groups in the UK as being part of the 'majority'.

A key argument supporting this term is that it shifts us away from deficit narratives inherently associated with be seen a belonging to a 'minority'. According to Rosemary Campbell-Stephens MBE

Rosemary Campbell-Stephens (2020) adopting the term Global Majority 'moves the conversation away from the margins to the centre', as well as validating the rich, diverse heritages that the various constituent groups possess.

Cons

While an important corrective to minority narratives, this framing does not manage to escape valorising majorities. Though the intentions are to the contrary, there is a danger that this term ends up justifying majoritarian political ideologies that assert the primacy of entitlements of 'the majority'.

This also raises questions of its suitability for challenging racism in majority white institutional settings. i.e. one does not solve roots of

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discrimination, of which majoritarianism is central, but simply displaces the problem.

Another potential difficulty with shifting the emphasis away from the overtly racialised descriptors such as 'BAME' and White is that one may end up, albeit inadvertently, exposing oneself to a 'post-race' agenda characteristic of the arguments presented in the Sewell Report (2021).

Further, it could be argued that the term is too homogeneous to be able to have any useful value, both empirically in relation to identifying patterns of disadvantage, and politically, in ways that Black or even BAME have been able to articulate a collective group experience of racialisation.

People of colour

Pros

Historically, within the UK, the use of the term 'coloured people' was associated with colonial and racist attitudes and was rejected accordingly. However, within the context of the US and the Black civil rights movement, the association with 'colour' and people took on a different meaning, one that is now increasingly being adopted within the UK.

This framing carries a positive sense of identity and political solidarity around a rejection of colour-coded racism, as set out by Dhruvarajan (2000, p. 166, in Finnigan & Richards, 2016:4): The term 'people of colour', although it lacks some precise conceptual clarity, has a political connotation like the term "Black" in the British context; the term is used to confront stigmatising people with pigmentation that is different from the pigmentation of the dominant (white) group.

The term is widely used in the US and expresses affiliation with more US and global anti-racist struggles.

Cons

In the US, the term BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) has been preferred by many to acknowledge specific historically rooted racial oppressions. However, this partially disaggregated group, arguably suffers many of the pitfalls of 'BAME' as an overarching category. Moreover, the US situation raises questions of whether the term adequately accounts for the specificity of anti-Black racism in the UK.

Another problem with 'people of colour' is that it emphasises colour only for racialised bodies (Alim, 2016). Accordingly, it maintains whiteness as a non-colour, as absence of 'race' and therefore perpetuates the 'white-gaze' which, as Grant, (20015) notes, 'traps black people in white imaginations.

Ethnic minority, minoritised

Pros

One of the central recommendations of the Sewell Report (2021) is to 'Stop using aggregated and unhelpful terms such as 'BAME', to better focus on understanding disparities and outcomes for specific ethnic groups. (p14). A general descriptor 'ethnic minority' is suggested as it moves us away from seeing ethnicity in 'monolithic' terms, such as Black, Asian, White etc. Hence by focusing on ethnicity, one can develop a more nuanced, granular inclusive approach.

The use of the adjective 'minoritised' instead of 'minority' draws attention the continued lack of acknowledgment of different experiences and needs of students from historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups, even when they are not a numerical minority, in the learning environment. (Hillier, 2020)

Moreover, it recognises that ethnic groups that are minorities in the UK may constitute majorities in the global population, which, given the diverse international student population of universities is an important fact to recognise.

Cons

Whilst it is difficult to see any problems with the terms 'ethnic minority' which appears quite benign, when seem in the context of the wider debate regarding the issue of structural racism and ongoing legacies of colonialism, there is a real danger that by emphasising ethnic differences, one may end of pitching minorities against each other. Moreover, as the Institute of Race Relations (2021) note in their response to the Sewell report, by focusing on ethnic differences, the research agenda will be fixed on 'ethnic disadvantage', with differences in ethnic outcomes become 'attributed to cultural and genetic factors, rather than the discriminatory hand of state institutions.'

Such a move could therefore inevitable undermine anti-racist movements that rely on a sense of shared identity of a common struggle, if not identical experience, against racism that privileges whiteness. And so, whilst one can, in an ideal sense, see the logic behind any attempt to de-racialise the discourse, the effect, will be to push the issue of racism underground.

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