

Behind the Rhodes Statue: Black Competency and the Imperial Academy

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Introduction

Stuart Hall was a central figure in the formation of Britain's "new left", a founding force in the field of cultural studies, and a scholar who introduced thousands of mature and working students to the study of modernity via his Open University courses and text books (Warmington 2014, 92–94). Hall entered the British academy in 1951 as a Jamaican youth to read an undergraduate degree in English at Merton College, Oxford. Much later in his life, Hall (2017, 169, 2010, 179) reflected that, in his days at Oxford, Black culture, colonial questions and Commonwealth politics "formed an indispensable, active seam" of his intellectual enquires. Hall's recollections situate a community of Black and Commonwealth students within the heart of British academia discussing the fate of empire and the prospects of independence. That Black intellectualism was an uncomfortable intrusion into the academy is suggested by Hall's (2017, 158) comments on the stretched politeness he experienced at Oxford: "I was conscious all the time that I was very, very *different* because of my race and color. And in the discourses of Englishness, race and color remained unspeakable silences."

In this way, Britain's most accomplished public intellectual of the 20th century started his academic career as a Rhodes Scholar. But Hall's intellectual community of non-white Commonwealth citizens would have been met with considerable distaste by his benefactor. After all, Cecil Rhodes intended his scholarship fund to develop a cadre of leading colonists working across race and religion expressly for the "retention of the unity of the Empire" (Stead 1902, 23). In 2015, Rhodes's legacy became entangled in inter-generational struggles over the structural legacies of Apartheid in South Africa, the failures of ANC rule, and continued institutional racism in the country's sites of higher learning. By April, the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) student movement had succeeded in bringing down the mining magnate's statue at the University of Cape Town. At this point in time, and approximately 60 years after Hall's residency, students brought RMF to Oxford, agitating for the removal of Rhodes' statue outside Oriel College, his Alma Mater.

Academic critics were quick to attribute fault to the RMF Oxford campaign. For Will Hutton (2015), principal of Hertford College, University of Oxford, and former editor-in-chief of the Observer newspaper, Rhodes's thoughts and actions needed to be placed in his historical context, and such an undertaking required "an open mind, freedom of debate and unobstructed access to facts: a trilogy which campaigners tend to neglect". Anthony Lemon (2016), an esteemed geographer and South Africa specialist at Oxford, similarly criticized the tenor of RMF for its over-emotiveness, reminding activists that "a healthy culture does not cease to remember those with whom it has come to disagree". Mary Beard (2015), popular classicist at Cambridge, likewise argued that, rather than a "great statue cull", the challenge was to "look history in the eye and reflect on our awkward relationship to it". Effectively, the critics claimed that RMF ran the risk of disavowing self-reflective and impartial inquiry, hallmarks of the academic ethos (see also Anthony 2016; D'Ancona 2016; Grove 2015).

But RMF Oxford did not only push for a statue's removal. The campaign also insisted that "many people from marginalized groups ... have made valuable intellectual contributions and we believe their exclusion reflects an on-going legacy of racist imperialism". In this respect, statue removal segued into a broader student movement to "decolonize" the academy's epistemological and phenomenological "whiteness" when it came to institutional practices, reading lists, and faculty (Chaudhuri 2016; see as examples Hussain 2015; Richards 2015). Henceforth, many critics of RMF's activism equated "decolonizing" with vulgarizing and relativizing academic inquiry by making the criteria for knowledge inclusion that of racial identity rather than the intrinsic worth of ideas (Williams 2017). Even nuanced engagements with "decolonizing" advocates (for example Malik 2017) inevitably rang the same alarm: the narcissism of identity politics degraded intellectual inquiry to the extent that the academy might no longer be considered a place of "higher" learning.

RMF Oxford made one further demand: for better representation and welfare provision of Black and minority ethnic students (RMF Oxford 2015). It is important to note that debates over statues and decolonizing agendas have been intricately bound to policy-oriented conversations regarding the increased – but unevenly distributed – presence of Black and minority ethnic students in British higher education (for example, Alexander and Arday 2015; Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancioğlu 2018). In fact, the politicization of the Black presence in academia has increasingly functioned as a postcolonial bellwether for elite-manufactured concerns over the displacement of white Britons in their "own" country caused economically by globalisation, culturally by immigration, and politically by anti-discriminatory legislation (see Sveinsson 2009). In February 2016, four months before the EU referendum, Toby Young, a self-styled "progressive eugenicist", took issue with Prime Minister David Cameron's focus on the relative paucity of Black students in the country's most prestigious universities. Writing in the *Telegraph*, Young claimed that "[Cameron] is wrong about the ethnicity of those students and wrong about where the problem lies. It's working-class white boys who fare the worst, not black boys..." (Young 2016).

When appraising RMF Oxford across all these dimensions it becomes clear that the campaign has exacerbated a longstanding fear of the intellectual degeneration of higher education in service of politically instrumental goals (for example, in 1950s Britain see Oakeshott 2004; in 1990s USA see Searle 1993). This fear invokes a defense of the academic ethos – impartiality, curiosity and discernment – against a contaminating wave of identity-politics, narcissism and vulgarism. The academy, its defenders claim, is confronted by outside forces that would compromise and partialize the higher pursuit of knowledge: that is, multicultural politics in the public sphere brings reactionary identity politics into the academic sphere. Crucially, this defensiveness associates degenerative political forces external to the academy with the intimate presence, inside, of "non-traditional" students – and increasingly those with correspondingly racialized – and gendered – bodies (see especially Nkopo, Madenga, and Chantiluke 2018). It is not that the critics of RMF have wished to remove these bodies from the academy. But the nature of their defense necessarily problematizes the presence of these bodies within the academy.

In this article, I aim to historically and intellectually contextualise the apprehension that an intimate Black presence destabilizes the ethos of higher education. Prompted by Hall's recollections of 1950s Oxford, I seek to disturb the grounds upon which critics contrast RMF (and other decolonizing campaigns) against an ideal image of the impartial and discerning academy. I do not directly address the contemporary impact of racialized

institutional habits on Black students, especially the assumption that the lower attainment of this cohort is somehow due to a cultural deficit (see Shilliam 2016a; and most recently, Royal Historical Society 2018). Rather I seek to contribute to a literature that reveals the complicity of the British academy in politics concerning the fate of imperial rule (for example Pietsch 2013; Steinmetz 2013; Bailkin 2012). Specifically, I excavate a genealogy of academic debates that sought to assess the effects of an increased proximity of Black presence to empire's white spaces.

In what follows I move behind the battle over statues (see especially Rao 2017) to argue that historical debates over Black presence implicate the British academy in the Empire's southern African interests. These debates were initiated by social anthropologists in the inter-war years primarily (albeit not solely) with regards to studies of southern Africa's urbanizing spaces. Furthermore, I demonstrate how such debates were highly influential to the study of "race relations" in Britain's post-war era of Commonwealth immigration. Critically, all these debates problematized the cognitive competency of African/Black peoples to inhabit white spaces in ways that were not destabilizing of imperial order. Current campus campaigns such as RMF should not be evaluated against an ideal image of the academy. Rather, they form part of a continued confrontation with the afterlives of academic dispositions that were implicated in the imperial project that Rhodes was integral to.

The etymology of "disposition" comprises a sense of arrangement as well as a sense of determination. By disposition, then, I mean the epistemological arrangement of heterogeneous elements that come together in a particular context, a coming together that is also an orientation towards particular commitments (see in general Bussolini 2010). An intellectual disposition frames a set of elements into a coherent problem at the same time as this framing clarifies ethical commitments to the redressing of that problem. For the sake of conciseness, I explore these dispositions through the thought of key intellectuals primarily in the fields of social anthropology and sociology. And I tease out the ways in which the Southern African milieu influenced these dispositions by way of engaging variously with intellectual biographies, substantive inquiry, and analytical framings.

I first turn to "colonial development", a disposition indebted to the humanitarianism of white abolitionism but which substantively inquired into the destabilizing effects of urbanization on African natives principally regarding Britain's imperial interests in southern Africa. Secondly, I investigate how "race relations" dispositions emerged out of these substantive and analytical engagements amongst social anthropologists of South African provenance as well as those clustered around Edinburgh University. Thirdly, I demonstrate how the race relations disposition in Britain struggled to overcome the association of Black proximity with a cognitive incompetency that was destabilizing of empire, even at empire's end. In this struggle, intellectual biographies and analytical framings variously continued to implicate the southern African imperial milieu.

Colonial Development and Southern Africa

In the late 18th and early 19th century white abolitionists distinguished themselves from pro-slavery lobbies by arguing that enslaved Africans were human rather than things or animals. Nevertheless, abolitionists assumed that slavery had such a debasing effect that the enslaved could be considered human in biology only. Due to this logic the humanitarianism of abolitionists was always qualified by the claim that "freed slaves" would have to be trained, over generations, into the civilized competencies that would allow them to fully enact

their humanity (see in general Drescher 2000; Davis 1975). Abolitionist humanitarianism effected a long lasting influence upon the imperial academy when the Ethnological Society of London emerged in 1843 from the Aborigine's Protection Society, itself set up by white abolitionists post-emancipation (see in general Stocking 1999). Edward Tylor, once member of the Ethnological Society, was the first professor of anthropology to be appointed in the British academy. James Frazer, influenced by Tylor, was the first scholar to hold a professorship in Social Anthropology in the British academy.

In *Primitive Culture*, Tylor argued that the “general principles of savage religion”, far from being a “rubbish-heap of miscellaneous folly”, were “essentially rational”, albeit “working in a mental condition of intense and inveterate ignorance” (Tylor 1920, 22). Surviving primitive logics, if internally rational, were nonetheless inferior to contemporaneous civilized rationalities, hence revealing the cognitive incompetence of primitive peoples (see in general Ratnapalan 2008). Frazer provided a cognate argument to Tylor in his 1908 inaugural lecture at the University of Liverpool. While the contemporary savage could shed light on the “evolution of the human mind” (Frazer 1908, 7), the savage mind had somehow not managed to evolve at the rate and reliability of civilized man. The task of social anthropology was therefore to record savage life for posterity, before it was eclipsed by the imperial expansion of European civilization. (Frazer 1908, 22). Hence, Tylor and Frazer's humanitarianism disposed them towards the contemporary “savage” as a dependent subject, with a human propensity to advance, but who required imperially-induced training in cognitive competency to do so.

Tylor and Frazer's writings span the fin de siècle era in which European and North American powers engaged in increased inter-imperial competition. By the early 20th century, concern for the British empire's “undeveloped estates” (Will 1970, 129–31) set the scene for a concerted turn towards colonial development with a special focus on African colonies. Post-world war one, Lord Lugard (1922) laid out his thesis on the “dual mandate” of colonial rule in West Africa, which aspired to economically strengthen empire while simultaneously developing the competencies of the African ‘native’. The latter's interests were ill-served by the 1929 Colonial Development Act, which provided regular funds principally for the “purpose of aiding and developing agriculture and industry” and with a specific view to “promoting commerce with or industry in the United Kingdom”. Under pressure from various strikes and uprisings that heralded the start of World War Two, the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act sought to redress the neglect of the native's standard of living.

During these decades, social anthropology became professionalized within the academy at the same time as its key aims, purposes and methods became intimately entangled with – albeit by no means dominated by – the imperatives of colonial development (see Kuklick 1991). The 1940 Act led to the formation in 1944 of the Colonial Social Science Research Council (see especially Steinmetz 2013). Lord Hailey (1944, 11), heavily involved in the Council, characterized the resulting methodological shift in social anthropology as one that moved from a speculative investigation of how societies originated towards the practical “manner in which societies work”. The new “functionalists” explicitly distinguished their project from that of older generation of ethnologists (who they associated with Tylor and Frazer); they instead directed their concerns towards the increasingly intimate presence of natives in the urban milieus of Britain's African dependencies. However, as I shall now argue, this new disposition of “colonial development” retained the hierarchies through which Tylor and Frazer's humanitarianism had adjudicated the cognitive competencies of savages vis-à-vis the civilized.

For many social anthropologists of the inter-war years, the material effects of colonial development seemed to be compressing humanity's evolutionary stages within the very sites of ethnographic fieldwork. This apprehension was especially pronounced in the work of Bronislaw Malinowski (1929, 36–37), the most influential social anthropologist in the interwar British academy due to his innovations in the practice of fieldwork and his challenge to evolutionary schemas that had been the norm across the social sciences (for an overview see Allan 2018, 157–63). Malinowski challenged his profession with the practical implications of this growing proximity. “[A]ccustomed as he is to deal with the simple mind and to understand simple cultures”, Malinowski challenged the anthropologist to rethink the subject of his inquiry – the native – now that the lands, resources and labor of the “tribe” were being increasingly utilized by the colonial economy. In place of the primitive and “uncontaminated” native of ethnographic lore, Malinowski (1945, 2, 1929, 28) proposed a focus on the “changing Native”.

The political significance of this shift in focus lay in the interaction between the simple culture of the native - with its provinciality and unreflexivity - and the complex culture of the European - with its universalism and dynamism. Malinowski directed concerns over this interaction to Britain's practice of “indirect rule” in its African colonies. Wherever order depended upon the upholding of native authority, the utility of social anthropology was to provide a sophisticated and accurate explanation of the “deep seated moral and legal force behind native sanction” which made “a law-abiding citizen out of a so called savage” (Malinowski 1929, 28). At stake in anthropological research, therefore, was the effect of colonial development on empire's very integrity:

the truth that you cannot with impunity undo or subvert an old system of traditions, of morals or laws and replace it by a ready-made new morality and sense of right; the result invariably will be what might "black bolshevism" (Malinowski 1929, 28).

The blackening of Communism was a standard trope in colonial administration, which mooted the channeling of savage rage into a global conspiracy against imperial interests.

Colonial development was nowhere more fraught with such disorderly potential than in the territories that had until the mid-1920s fallen under the administration of Rhodes' British South African Company (Southern and Northern Rhodesia), as well as Britain's old dominion of South Africa, now a commonwealth member. Regardless of shifting and variable modes of governance, extractive industries knitted these southern African territories and polities together into an imperial interest for Britain. Here, the idea of a dual mandate was especially politicized by the presence of whites on native lands and the development of significant extractive industries that required the expansion of mining towns, townships, and hence the urbanization of native populations (see Foks 2018, 39–40).

One year after Lord Lugard published his thesis on the dual mandate, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1958, 31), then professor of social anthropology at Cape Town, opined that the impetus for contemporary study was demonstrated by the “need of finding some way in which two different races, with very different forms of civilization, may live together in one society, politically, economically and morally in close contact, without the loss to the white race of those things in its civilization that are of greatest value...”. Indeed, the disposition towards colonial development that emerged in inter-war social anthropology was acutely oriented towards Empire's southern Africa interest. Even Malinowski, who had made

his name from his work in the West Pacific, had by 1934 clearly turned his attention to the African continent, even taking a 5 month fieldwork trip through southern Africa (as well as visiting Britain's east African settler-colony, Kenya).

An influential collection of Malinowski's notes and essays on southern Africa and settler-colonialism made in the 1930s were posthumously published at the end of world war two as *The Dynamics of Cultural Change*. In these notes, Malinowski (1945, 9) framed the intellectual – as well as political – challenge of contact and change by way of three idealized categories, each containing “a special phase of the cultural process”: European districts, tribal reserves, and then the districts in which Africans and Europeans “collaborated” and depended upon each other directly. Malinowski (1945, 25) connected this third space specifically to townships and mining compounds. Here, he suggested, a “new type of human being” was being produced by the impact of “European civilization” on “archaic Africa”, namely, the “westernized” or “educated” African” (Malinowski 1945, 25). It was this type that for Malinowski embodied the disorderly potential of colonial development.

In Malinowski's (1945, 158–61) estimation, the Westernized/educated African evolved through a number of stages. Firstly, he (and for Malinowski, it was a he) entered a process of detribalization as he took up Christianity, European schooling, the labor contract, administrative work, or entered the military/police. The “overwhelming” superiority of European ways would compel a renunciation of African values as the native entered a “new covenant”. Seeking European prestige and influence, this new African would then enter the European or American university system and usually succeed in graduating. Yet upon return to the colony he would experience a color bar in white-dominated occupations and positions that fundamentally rebuffed his aspirations to assimilate. In response, the native would fall back upon African beliefs and values. Regardless, in Malinowski's estimation the return by the African to African ways would be inauthentic in that it produced a hybrid form of association which combined the ascriptive particularities of tribal life with the universal aspirations of civilized life. The result was an explosion of tribal, regional or Pan-African nationalisms and separatist institutions, e.g. Black churches.

Malinowski's thesis laid the problem of colonial disorder at the door of the native African who crossed from the rural to the urban. His assessment presumed a cognitive incompetence on the part of this native to rationally engage in contact with complex modes of European cooperation and sociality. However, this quite brutal assessment undermined the humanitarian impulse that Malinowski had inherited from Tylor and (especially) Frazer through which he had previously argued that even “savage races” shared a basic proclivity to the “scientific attitude”, purportedly the cognitive foundation for civilized, complex socialities (1954a, 17).

To address this conundrum, I want to briefly consider the influence of Charles Seligman on Malinowski. Seligman, Malinowski's teacher, had famously proposed that African civilization - such as there was – had been introduced by migrating pastoral European “Hamites”. He was also known for his attempts to integrate psychology into social anthropology. Seligman was convinced that, although the dream-states of savage minds conformed to those of civilized minds, the division between the conscious and unconscious was “specially pervious in primitive peoples” leading to a far more “instinctual” temperament resulting in “sudden tempestuous fits of anger”, “suggestibility”, and sexual “liberty” (Seligman 1932, 204, 219). In his earlier work in the Trobriand islands, Malinowski (1954b) explored primitive psychology through the function of myth – a “satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements”.

Key, here, is Malinowski's (1954a, 83, 126) assertion that myth did not function in the primitive psychology in symbolic terms, but rather as a direct expression of the efficacy of its subject matter - a matter that was still alive.

The fragility of the wall that separated the unconscious and conscious, the id and the ego, are as palpable in Malinowski's descriptions as they are in his mentor's. Malinowski's loyalty to the notion of "primitive psychology" was, for him, what made the "scientific attitude" of savages so tenuous and conditional. Accordingly, Malinowski could not bring himself to positively acknowledge the ability of the urbanizing African to adapt to his new environment. Instead, he presumed the African to be unable to adapt by reason and only able to react by resentment. Put another way, urbanization in a colonial context could not be said to develop the cognitive competency of Africans so that they could take part in European society, despite their cultural deficiencies. Instead, the movement from the rural to the urban – from the ascriptive-simple tribal to the universal-complex European milieu – perverted this development so as to produce a disorderly and dangerous Black ego.

For these reasons, Malinowski (1945, 160) suspended his humanitarianism when it came to advocating for the removal of that most iniquitous object of resentment – the color bar. Instead, Malinowski was cautious in his prescription: "I am simply pointing out some of the forces which, wisely controlled, may ensure a normal and stable development but when mismanaged may lead to dangerous consequences." The control that Malinowski (1945, 161) suggested referred to a dampening of expectations, or, a pacification of Black ego. Colonial administrators, he advised, should "not preach to Africans that a 'full identity' with civilization can ever be reached by them".

We can, then, identify in Malinowski's work – at least in the late inter-war period - a set of elements that come together as a disposition towards colonial development. Firstly, Malinowski inherited an evolutionary narrative that marked a hierarchical difference between savage (ascriptive-simple) and civilized (universal-complex) cultures. Secondly, he nonetheless acknowledged that colonial development had practically shrunk the distance between savage and civilized. Thirdly, he also acknowledged the contradiction of pursuing a dual mandate, which was manifested most keenly in the color bar that Europeanizing natives encountered in the urban milieu. But fourthly, he argued that the cognitive incompetence through which natives experienced the color bar provoked dangerous and destabilizing reactions against colonial rule. Fifthly, therefore, he believed that the integrity of empire stood above all other ethical concerns.

In these ways, Malinowski's disposition towards colonial development turned upon an anxiety over Black cognitive incompetency and its destabilizing effect upon empire once African natives were put in increased proximity to white cultural spaces. Unlike his key competitor Radcliffe-Brown, this influential disposition did not emerge so much from his own biography: Polish born, his key sites of anthropological investigation were mostly in the Western Pacific. Still, his analytical framing of the problem of contact and change proved extremely influential and his inquiry, in this respect, drew deeply upon the matter of empire's southern African interest.

Race Relations in the Colonies and the Metropole

Not all social anthropologists were disposed towards colonial development in the same way as Malinowski. A few, even, were distinctly skeptical of the proposition that

African subjects could be developed at the same time as being used to enrich British Empire. Unlike Malinowski, the majority of these social anthropologists had personal and intellectual biographies that intimately connected them to the southern African interest. Their relatively incendiary thoughts found a home at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, established a few miles out of Lusaka in Northern Rhodesia, and the first British anthropological research unit to be situated in an African colony.

Initially, Hubert Winthrop Young, governor of Northern Rhodesia, proposed a research agenda for the Institute with a utilitarian focus on managing “the mixed African and non-African community” (Brown 1973, 179). Young was in part spurred to action by the copperbelt strikes of 1935 and the prospect of disorderly “detrribalization” as more and more African laborers moved into mining towns (Schumaker 2001, 167). Godfrey Wilson, a student of Malinowski and the Institute’s first director, operationalized this research program in partnership with his South African wife Monica Hunter. Both Wilson and Hunter’s work, referenced by Malinowski in his *Dynamics of Cultural Change*, addressed the social anxiety shared by many South African anthropologist regarding an increasingly intimate Black presence in European-majority areas (Schumaker 2001, 155). Reflecting the social anthropological disposition towards colonial development, Hunter and Wilson studied African lives outside of their “traditional” setting – i.e. in white farms and towns – as well as “non-traditional” processes, the key being urbanization (Brown 1973, 187; Rossetti 1985, 488).

In 1941, South African social anthropologist Max Gluckman replaced Wilson (rumored to have been dismissed from the Institute at the request of political forces). Gluckman was born in Johannesburg in 1911 and had previously studied at Exeter College, Oxford, courtesy of a Rhodes scholarship. Gluckman’s (1945) seven year research plan for the Institute continued Wilson and Hunter’s focus, once again drawing special attention to mining areas and to the “differential effects of labor migration and urbanization on the family and kinship organization”. But while Gluckman had great respect for Malinowski’s methodological innovations in field work, he took issue with his privileging of “contact” and “change” to the detriment of an analysis of “conflict”.

To Gluckman (1947, 108–9), it was clear that the “Rand mines” were a field of conflict, being in the service of extractive industries that benefited Europeans. To glean this field, and to expressly refute Malinowski’s functionalist argument about contact and change, Gluckman operationalized a “situational analysis”. By utilizing a thick description of a bridge opening ceremony, Gluckman drew out the contentious relations that brought together different Zulu agents and groups, as well as them and white agents, through a typical project of colonial development (see Gluckman 1940, see also 1961, 8). In this way, Gluckman oriented social anthropology away from the Malinowskian focus on the incompetency of the urbanizing African towards the unequal power relations that imbued colonial rule and structured the contradictions of colonial development.

Clyde Mitchell was one of Gluckman’s appointees at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. Mitchell had also been born in South Africa, but to a working class white family (University of Florida Libraries 2012). Following Gluckman, Mitchell (1974, 18–19) was convinced that migrant behavior could not be understood via Malinowski’s meta-categories of native/primitive and European, and their (dangerous and degenerative) fusion, but through the “social situation” that called forth these behaviors. His most influential piece of research,

undertaken at the Institute, was a study of the Kalela Dance, performed predominantly by migrants to the copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia.

In this work, Mitchell (1956, 28) argued that those natives who came to work in the urban areas tended to relate to Africans outside of their own cultural and geographical contexts through wider, undifferentiated categories of belonging. Consequently, more expansive alignments came to be invested with representative power, wherein chiefs were elected specifically to represent the labor interests of the urban “tribe” vis-à-vis Europeans who were now also homogenized as “management” (Mitchell 1956, 30–31). These specifically urban developments also gave rise to African-centered unions and associations in opposition to European interests. Mitchell’s dynamic understanding of conflict questioned the salience of the traditional “tribal” in urban politics, and thereby questioned Malinowski’s attribution of native cognitive incompetency. Mitchell (1956, 34) clarified his argument thus:

From the evidence we have at present, tribalism on the copperbelt is still the dominant category of interaction in social fields in which Africans alone are involved. But it is not a relevant category in the field of Black-White relations.

Evident in Gluckman and Mitchell’s work is a reorientation of social anthropology towards a politics of conflict mediated by “race relations”. Crucially, regardless of how they might have assessed the cognitive competency of African natives, they did not consider this competency to be a fundamental factor in – or cause of - contact and cultural change. Rather, for both, the intimacies of racial politics caused by urbanization demonstrated the conflictual situations arising out of colonial development. This new disposition towards race relations thus distinguished itself from the Malinowskian disposition towards colonial development. Even though both problematized the proximities forced by urbanization, only Malinowski made a causal claim upon Black cognitive competency as a factor of disorder.

As Gluckman and Mitchell challenged received wisdoms regarding an intimate Black presence in white spaces, social anthropology was increasingly tasked to investigate the urbanization of colonial subjects who were migrating even further afield - to empire’s heartland. Due to this contemporaneous intellectual evolution, the colonial development disposition became extremely influential to the study of race relations in Britain, bringing with it the intellectual and political tensions concerning contact, change, conflict and imperial order.

In the summer of 1940 Kenneth Little began a research project in physical anthropology on the Black community of Cardiff’s Tiger Bay. Having interacted with the community, Little quickly came to shift his focus towards an investigation of the “color bar” experienced by the Bay’s residents (Banton 2011). Through his research, Little became normatively concerned about racial injustice, and wrote a briefing paper to the Colonial Office wherein he took issue with the “implications of inferiority, meniality, unintelligence etc which are attributed to colored people and more particularly the Negro” (Mills 2010, 132). He published *Negroes in Britain: A Study of Race Relations in English Society* in 1947.

Crucially, while Little criticized the prevailing racist assumptions of colonial rule, including attributions of Black cognitive incompetency, his disposition towards these problems was heavily informed by social anthropology and the challenge of colonial development that the field had sought to meet. In fact, in the same year as finishing his PhD on Tiger Bay, Little undertook his “first spell of fieldwork in Africa” (Little 1974, 1).

Although investigating the Mende of Sierra Leone in West Africa, it is clear that his research, funded in part by the Social Science Research Council of the Colonial Office, was influenced by the framings of urbanization drawn from investigations of empire's southern African interest. For instance, Little tracked movements from rural tribal areas to mines and townships; he explored the adoption by migrants of European mores and values including schooling; he assessed – in a Malinowskian frame - the increasing consciousness of European/African “hybridity”; and he considered the social and political tensions arising from an increase in such a population (see Little 1948b).

In 1949, Little replaced Ralph Piddington (a supervisee of Malinowski) as lead academic for Edinburgh University's new Social Sciences Research Unit. At Edinburgh, Little supported and/or supervised a host of academics who made key contributions to the study of Commonwealth citizens residing in Britain. If not a “school” per se (Banton 1983, 558) the Edinburgh research did cohere around an assumption that the study of urbanization in Africa and race relations in Britain was one field joined by the methods and premises of social anthropology (Mills 2010, 135; and see for example Little 1960, 255). Most importantly, Little's associates at Edinburgh were invested in critically transposing the social anthropology of colonial development into a sociology of British race relations. To this effect, Edinburgh scholarship focused especially, albeit not exclusively, on the African-Caribbean and continental African - i.e. Black - presence in Britain. One reason for this focus can be gleaned from Little's (1943, 13) belief that the English population were more prejudiced against persons of African heritage “than against other colored nationalities”, and that that prejudice was “more widespread” when accompanied by physical proximity.

A brief survey of the Edinburgh scholarship is instructive. Black Jamaican scholar Sydney Collins (1957) actually joined Edinburgh before Little and undertook the first comparative study of “asiatic” (predominantly Muslim) and African communities in Britain, focusing on northern English towns. Nigerian scholar Eyo Basse Ndem undertook a study of “colored communities” in Manchester, the city that had hosted the 1945 Pan-African Congress in which Ndem had taken part as representative for the Calabar Improvement League. A.T. Carey and Sheila Kitzinger (nee Webster) investigated commonwealth students in London. Sheila Patterson documented the Caribbean presence in Brixton, while Michael Banton, later to become a pre-eminent figure in the sociology of race relations, undertook an investigation of the “colored quarter” in London's docklands.

North American intellectual currents were partially influential to Edinburgh scholarship (see in general Clapson 2006). After all, the term “race relations” was coined in Chicago in the 1920s. Yet I would strongly argue that what the Chicago school provided to the research program at Edinburgh was less the disposition of race relations per se and much more a set of sociological methods appropriate for analyzing race in urban settings, for example, the notion of “district” differentiation and the parsing of household data (for example Little 1948a, 23–25; Banton 1956, 60–62). The analytical framing of race relations in Britain owed most to social anthropological dispositions towards empire's southern African interest; it was not a North American derivative. To demonstrate this point, and to especially clarify the ways in which Black cognitive competency was central to the evolving academic disposition towards race relations, I want to turn to Eyo Ndem's (1957) study of Manchester.

Addressing the question as to whether empire's Black subjects could assimilate to English life, Ndem focused upon the difference between status gained by ascription – which

he associated with the “traditional African system” – and status gained by achievement – associated with the “British social system”. Ndem noticed that Africans resident in Britain could side-step their ascriptive inferiority through achievement and so raise their “class”. Yet Ndem also noted that Black aspiration was dependent upon how their white “class” peers would accept their new status. Furthermore, acceptance was based not on Black achievement but upon the degree to which aspirants were able to eschew the inferior behavior and incompetent norms of sociality ascribed to the African “native”, such as raucous laughter (Ndem 1957, 84–85). Ndem’s study suggested that, while the path to civilization for the Black individual lay in self-development from the traditional-ascriptive-colonial world to the modern-achieving-industrial world, such a path was in practice racialized. Impartial social advance was overwhelmingly moderated through an informal “color bar” that adjudicated an individual’s competency to inhabit Englishness (see also Little 1958, 6–7).

Ndem’s work demonstrates how key elements of the colonial development disposition - urbanization, the color bar, culture clash, and uneven power relations - were transposed to analytically frame study of race relations in Britain. There was, however, one difference. In the inter-war and war-time period, the “race problem” in Britain pertained mostly to the rise of “half-caste” children, caused by the presence of non-white sailors in dockside cities and African-American troops barracked near various towns (see Drake 1955). Post-war, the perceived location of the problem shifted. In southern Africa, urban townships had been the pivotal site wherein Black presence challenged empire’s integrity; in post-war Britain, that site became the Academy itself.

At this point in time, some civil servants and politicians worried that resentment of and reaction to the color bar especially by Black students might impact badly upon the integrity of the Commonwealth as independence beckoned for many colonies (Bailkin 2012, 96). It seems that behind this concern lay a distrust of the mental maturity of such students. For instance, the Colonial Office warned in 1948 that Commonwealth students were vulnerable to communist propaganda due to the lack of “corrective home and social influence” enjoyed by English students (Bailkin 2012, 113). It is telling, in this respect, that one Nigerian student, Chikwenda Nwariaku, complained that the National Union of Students did not trust a mature graduate from the continent visiting Eastern Europe, but was convinced that a 20 year old white fresher would be able to resist Russian influence (Institute of Race Relations 1965, 80).

How were the cognitive competencies of Black Commonwealth students perceived at the time by some of Stuart Hall’s contemporaries? Informants for Sheila Kitzinger’s study of Oxbridge students spoke of the difficulties in constructing friendships with white peers who took the activity to be a philanthropic gesture on their part: “They speak to you very nicely, but all the time they seem to be thinking, “I wonder whether he can read?” (Kitzinger 1960, 170). Most importantly, Kitzinger’s informants reported that the black/white relationship would break down when the white partner became “embarrassed by the Negro’s self-consciousness” (Kitzinger 1960, 169). Other data gathered by the recently formed Institute of Race Relations testified to similar experiences. For instance, Jamaican Rhodes scholar, Meryvn Morris, who attended St Edmund Hall in 1958, complained of the predominant complement being a surprised “you speak English very well” (Institute of Race Relations 1965, 7). Similarly, Patricia Madoo, a Trinidadian taking Modern History at St Annes

College in 1960 recounted the common question being “how long have you been speaking English”? (Institute of Race Relations 1965, 58)¹

Moreover, some commentators assumed that Black students were not just ill-disposed towards academic study at the highest level, but that they were psychologically ill-equipped to inhabit a space intimately shared with white students. For instance, Dame Margery Perham, a writer on native administration on the continent, BBC broadcaster, and inter-war and post war lecturer and fellow at Oxford, warned in Malinowskian terms that the psyches of African students in Britain were warped by the prospect of the “supreme racial compensation” promised by sleeping with white women (Bailkin 2012, 110).

The same Malinowskian fears of Black ego were, in fact, evident in Banton’s early work. In his investigation of Freetown, Sierra Leone, undertaken immediately after his ethnography of London’s East End, Banton had used Malinowski’s contact thesis to draw attention to a “new structure of roles” arising out of the self-organization of urbanizing Africans (Banton 1957, 219–20). And with regards to Black arrivals in urban Britain, Banton (1953b, 59) channeled Malinowski’s distrust of their cognitive competency, arguing that “the slights, rebuffs and discrimination - real and imagined - which they experience may afterwards cause a reaction of resentment and may lead to a rejection of British cultural values and to political nationalism”. Although these comments spoke to the Black population in general, it is evident that Banton had particularly in mind the reaction of Commonwealth students in particular. Projecting political anxieties concerning independence movements, Banton observed that “leaders of public opinion” increasingly realized that Black students had to be re-imagined as “leaders of the rising colored nations whose friendship is important to the imperial country” (Banton 1953b, 57; see, in a similar vein, Garigue 1953).

The shift by social anthropologists towards a race relations disposition therefore connected empire’s peripheries and metropole into one field of analysis through the phenomenon of urbanization. But while this shift was driven by biographical and substantive engagements with the southern African milieu, in Britain the shift relied more upon analytical framings of this milieu through which the academy itself featured substantively.

The Cognitive Competency of Familiar Strangers

It is fair to say that the critique of Malinowski’s model was first advanced in southern Africa, especially at the Rhodes-Livingstone institute. Cognate critiques took far more convoluted turns on British soil and revolved principally around Banton’s influential scholarship on race relations.

Over the course of the 1950s, Banton became attracted to Gluckman’s analysis of the Zulu bridge episode, primarily for the way in which it enabled the study of macro processes at the level of the individual (Banton 2015, 1372). In this regard, Banton turned to the analysis of “in-group”/“out-group” distinctions and the concomitant measurement of “social distance” (Banton 1953a, 131; see also Richmond 1954; Manley 1955). This, in turn, led Banton towards the work of Clyde Mitchell, specifically, the latter’s explanation of the

¹ The one exception proved the rule. In 1959, Ghanaian William Abraham was elected as a prize scholar to All Souls. The Observer newspaper reported at the time that Oxford was “astonished” at his election. Some electors were “visibly upset” by the choice and the Warden accepted the result only through “gritted teeth” (Russel 2018).

variable perception of social distance when parsed through the sociological figure of the “stranger”. Banton drew upon Mitchell’s suggestion that hospitality to the “stranger” was a customary duty that had “relatively little significance” for inter-tribal relations in the urban areas as opposed to the significance of such a duty when it came to allowing the stranger to permanently occupy tribal land (Banton 1960, 177). From Mitchell’s distinction between the relative weightiness of rural and urban affiliations in the colonial context, Banton crafted a broader rule: the category of the “stranger” determined social distance, but not all strangers were equal in all contexts - some held particular characteristics that would mark their distance more than others (Banton 1960, 175).

Henceforth Banton argued, in a book he later described as a “synthesis of the Edinburgh research” (2011), that race relations in Britain could be understood in terms of the changing nature of the “customary image of the colored man ... and his place in society” (Banton 1959, 95). In some situations, explained Banton, older racial apprehensions remained to imbue in the Black stranger a special distance, i.e. Black students inhabiting mixed sex hostels. But in other situations, i.e. in single-sex hostels, the colonial distance was shrinking (Banton 1959, 95). In other words, the severity of the informal color bar could be more accurately assessed by the degree to which particular contexts made the Black body more of a disruptive stranger than at other times and places.

What was the effect of this analytical shift for Banton’s disposition towards race relations? Firstly, the trope of the “stranger”, which proved to be extremely influential to sociologists of race relations, averted Banton from further following Malinowski’s attribution of a dangerous cognitive incompetency and reactionary ego to Black urban residents of Britain. And to be fair, this shift in register was far more conducive to the onus that Banton and others had always placed on the “host” community to make “assimilation” work (for example Banton 1953a, 133; Collins 1957, 15).

Nevertheless, and secondly, Banton did not so much deconstructed previous claims to Black cognitive incompetency garnered from the southern African colonial context; rather, he abstracted – epistemically de-racialized - Black incompetence into the sociological figure of the stranger (see especially Waters 1997). Mitchell had situated his “stranger” explicitly within a colonial field, where distance was defined precisely by the politics of colonial development as it structured the content of - and relationship between - rural and urban spaces. This sensitivity to power and context, afforded by Gluckman’s situational analysis, was lost by Banton when he de-situationalised the stranger, thus leaving the colonial field behind, thereby analogizing the Commonwealth citizen to stranger and attenuating the empire to the nation.

This abstraction led to significant logical inconsistencies in Banton’s disposition towards race relations. Consider, for instance, how he described the figure of the stranger as one who is “not only uncertain of the [societal] norms: he cannot read the signs” (Banton 1959, 97). This attribution of cognitive incompetency is entirely out of keeping with what Banton himself knew was a core reality of imperial pedagogy: the native was taught in the colonies to know – and laud - the metropolis, while the English populations of the metropole were never systematically taught to know their fellow colonial subjects. And surely, this asymmetry in cognitive competency was the reason why “Negro self-consciousness” appeared in Oxbridge as such an embarrassing – and politicized – accoutrement at empire’s end. Alternatively, consider Stuart Hall’s far more appropriate and contemporaneous depiction of himself in the halls of Oxford as a “*familiar* stranger”. There is an avowed self-

reflexivity in Hall's disposition towards the Black presence and academic ethos at the dawn of Britain's post-imperial era that is lost to Banton's analysis.

Hall, however, was most academically consequential not in sociology but rather in turning the tide at Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies towards considerations of race, class and nation (see especially Hall et al. 1978; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1992). Meanwhile, Banton's disposition was most effectively challenged in sociology by John Rex.

Born, as Mitchell had been, to a South African white working class family, Rex graduated from Rhodes University (inaugurated with a grant from the Rhodes trust) and, after a brief spell in southern Rhodesia, arrived in the UK in 1948 to teach in the extra-mural department of Hull University (Jenkins 2005, 201; Rex 2007, 13). Notably, Rex's (1954) first academic publication discussed the increasing threat of Apartheid to South African universities. In it, he took issue with the growing trend of student segregation, a phenomenon that directly affected his Alma mater. Rex also considered attempts to bridge the gap between student populations by, for instance, the National Union of South African students of which he himself had been a participant (Jenkins 2005, 202; Rex 2007, 14,16). Rex (1954, 338) warned that political segregation had academic implications, especially in terms of the funneling of Black and white students into practical and intellectual subjects respectively, driven by religious assumptions of providence and race. In this way, issues of Black cognitive competency and the academic ethos mark the departure point of Rex's intellectual oeuvre.

Rex subsequently framed these issues through an engagement with the literature on "plural societies", which addressed the potential for social integrity (or a "social will") to be garnered in ethnically diverse (and usually colonial/postcolonial) polities. Working through various models of contact and change, he picked up on but at the same time qualified Malinowski's influential contribution. While Rex acknowledged the utility of a third term that bridged traditional/native and modern/European - i.e. the "wholly new" that emerged from contact - he was critical of Malinowski's assumptions regarding Black cognitive incompetency. Rex (1959, 117-18) insightfully pointed out that, in Malinowski's model, there was no "determining roles for native intentions or interests" because, while European culture enjoyed a determining role, "natives simply react[ed]".

In Rex's view, the asymmetrical nature of Malinowski's model, with its assumption of Black cognitive incompetency, had political implications for any "principle of common measure". Above all, the common measure that arose from the dovetailing of European policy and African institutions was entirely lacking in any input from the African side. Rather than the result of a dialogical process, consensus was arrived at singularly by the "dominant group" (Rex 1959, 118-19). Working through this problem, Rex took inspiration from Gunnar Myrdal, whose war-time study, *The American Dilemma*, addressed the conflict between the American creed and its application to African Americans (Rex and Moore 1967, 5). Rex argued that the arbitrariness - rather than consensual nature - of value relevance in pluralist societies revealed the very idea of "functionalism" to be a "conservative utopia which has explanatory significance in so far as conservatives realize their social aims" (Rex and Tomlinson 1979, 2). In short, the teleological meaning of "function" provided by social anthropologists masked a pre-existing position of dominance (Rex 1963, 66).

Thus, from an initial concern over the racialization of the academic ethos, Rex moved to a critique of Black cognitive incompetence in framings of contact and change, which then

impelled him to expose “functionalism” as a supposedly neutral framing concept that was in fact complicit in legitimizing the conflictual hierarchies of colonial development. This was the disposition by which he endeavored to make sense of race relations in Britain.

Race relations, according to Rex (1970, 48), could in no way refer to Banton’s abstracted “stranger” or other sanitized ideas of culture shock. Against such abstractions, Rex persisted in connecting the British nation to the (post)imperial “homelands” of immigrants (Rex and Tomlinson 1979, 34–35). And against functionalist definitions, Rex defined race relations as “a situation of abnormally harsh exploitation, coercion or competition” wherein individuals could not simply choose to join another group and whereby such power was justified by deterministic theories about racial attributions (Rex 1982, 199). Consider, in this regard, Rex’s description of the Malinowskian “zone of transition” in 1960s Birmingham, a city that experienced a significant degree of new Commonwealth immigration, as a “life of squalor, of under-privilege and of conflict ... a world far from the functionally integrated social systems which sociologists are too fond of discussing” (Rex 1968, 230).

Overall, then, Rex’s disposed himself towards race relations in Britain by arguing that social anthropology had failed to sufficiently address the structurally conflictual nature of colonial development *including and especially at the level of knowledge production*. Crucially, the inclusion of a knowledge dimension betrays the abiding influence of Rex’s biography upon his disposition, especially his opposition to Apartheid in South Africa’s higher education system which he, himself, was a product of. This biographical detail is important. By the late 1960s higher education was no longer conceived by sociologists to be the principle space wherein a destabilizing Black/commonwealth presence attained. Yet Rex continued to take issue with the Black presence in the British academy as a problem of race relations via his continuing concerns over Apartheid in South African universities.

In 1974, Bhikhu Parekh surveyed a number of non-white intellectuals, including CLR James, on their residence in England and the nature of Englishness. Channelling his critique of value relevance and “functionalism”, Rex responded to Parekh’s intervention by questioning any celebration of the fact that Black intellectuals might be employed in key administrative positions in British society. The more important question, Rex argued, was whether the job required the intellectual to undertake work that supported or excused the problem of racism. Illustrative of this point, Rex (1974, 181) compared the British Community Relations Commission, which employed a number of relatively high profile Black intellectuals, to the South African Ministry of Bantu Affairs. (Historically, the ministry had acted as an ideological pillar of Apartheid by educating Black peoples of their supposed natural inferiority.) Rex considered the British Commission to be “a more half hearted and amateurish version”. He then turned this line of attack towards the academy, pointing out that that racist theories were increasingly being normalised and that academics were less and less predisposed towards anti-racism (Rex 1974, 185). What was needed now, Rex (1974, 182) argued, was “some research into the research process as an instrument of racism”.

Nonetheless, within a few years Rex was attracting criticism from Black scholars, many of whom, paradoxically, were affiliated to Stuart Hall’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Valerie Amos (currently Director of SOAS), Paul Gilroy and Errol Lawrence (1982) wrote an especially pertinent critique of “white sociology” (a label that also incorporated the work of one or two Black sociologists). In many ways, Amos et al’s intervention was framed around the abiding issue of Black cognitive competency. For instance, questioning the purpose and benefit of white sociology, Amos et al (1982, 16)

argued that “black people don’t need researchers to interpret their lives for them or to make them more accessible and acceptable to white society”. On this point, Rex was specifically criticized for the way in which he conceived of Black struggle as a “threat to established social order”, but a threat that ultimately required redress by white politicians inhabiting existing power structures (Amos, Gilroy, and Lawrence 1982, 18).

In one respect, Amos et al’s critique of Rex was unfair. They claimed that researchers such as Rex did not “take into account the extent to which their relationship to their respondents may be structured by racism” (Amos, Gilroy, and Lawrence 1982, 22). But as I have demonstrated above, Rex’s intellectual project was precisely to clarify the power relations at play in research, and in opposition to Malinowski’s faux consensus approach which, in actuality, sought to uphold imperial order. Yet in another respect, their critique of Rex hit home: his focus upon the arbitrariness of value relevance did not extend to considering the explanative value of the traditions of thought and political calculi of Black struggle itself.

Amos et al turned to Rex’s depiction of Rastafari in Birmingham as a movement defined by “political alienation from British society”. They questioned why Rex could not consider Rastafari on its own cognitive terms – not as an alienation from but as a *confrontation with* Britain’s white supremacism (Amos, Gilroy, and Lawrence 1982, 19).² Make no mistake, Rex’s disposition was avowedly anti-colonial. Nevertheless, following the critique of Amos et al, it is also the case that Rex’s disposition did not orient itself towards a positive engagement with what Kitzinger’s 1950s study of Commonwealth students had termed the “Negro’s self consciousness”. That particular self-consciousness remained as enigmatic in Rex’s analysis as it had been colored primitive in Malinowski’s.

A “disposition”, it will be remembered, is an arranging of heterogeneous elements into an orientation towards particular commitments. Intellectually, a disposition frames a set of elements into a coherent problem at the same time as this framing clarifies ethical commitments to the redress of that problem. To shift a disposition requires a realigning of all the elements that orient scholarship towards its research commitments. Of the two most influential sociologists of race relations, Banton recused himself of any such realignment by abstracting the Black presence from its imperial entanglements; Rex did confront these entanglements, but absent a dialogue with the consciousnesses which accompanied the Black presence.

By the mid-1980s, Britain’s postcolonial era had consolidated around neoliberalism and a demonization of Black and South Asian youth born or bred in Britain (see in general Hesse 1997). Regardless, a Black British intellectual disposition towards citizenship, rights and justice had already been founded by “familiar strangers” on the edges of as well as firmly outside of the academy. In this respect, Black consciousness offered a critical and compelling appraisal of Britain’s domestic struggles as part of a broader global struggle over Apartheid and the legacies of colonial rule (see for example Alleyne 2002; Gutzmore 1982; Trew 2010; John 2014; Garrison 1979; Adams 2002; Beckles 1998; Sivanandan 2008).

Conclusion

² For an antidote see the Rastafari-curated learning resource www.rastafari-in-motion.org

In this article I have documented a set of shifting intellectual dispositions towards the Black presence as it became increasingly intimate to the white spaces of the colonies and metropole - including the heart of Britain's academy. I have traced how assumptions of Black cognitive incompetency have long been implicated in academic debates over empire's integrity. These dispositions were all strongly – albeit variously – influenced by British Empire's investments in southern Africa, an influence professionally transmitted through social anthropology and sociology, which travelled along biographical, substantive and analytical lines. In terms of biography, many of the key intellectuals who struggled with/against the preservation of empire's integrity, even during its eclipse, had a South African provenance or connection; substantively, concerns over African urbanization in colonial townships inflected subsequent concerns over Black Commonwealth immigration into British towns; and this inflection was achieved analytically via framings of contact, change and conflict across townships and academic institutions, including Oxford.

There is, then, far more behind Rhodes's statue that implicates the British academy in empire's southern African interest. Social anthropologists and sociologists - Black and white - struggled theoretically, ethically and politically over the attribution of a destabilizing nature to Black presence especially in terms of a cognitive incompetence to accommodate contact and change. At one point, immediately post-war, that struggle was even had politically within the gates of Oxford's colleges and other academic institutions. In any case, that struggle was never intellectually resolved within the academy. And now, after decades and generations of settlement, Black students exist in that academy primarily as “domestic” students, with those defined as “Black African” being the largest group of the total BME student population (Shilliam 2016b).

All roads thus return us to RMF Oxford and the plethora of contemporary decolonizing campaigns on campuses. In light of the genealogy presented in this article, I would argue that these campaigns do not so much introduce a vulgar identity politics into the academy but rather force us to recall the academy's complicity in race and empire. By complicity I do not mean to dwell on guilt but rather on the academy's historical dispositions towards Black bodies and minds. Neither is this to assert that there are not traditions of academic inquiry that can be usefully retrieved to further contemporary critique. Still, at the heart of the issue lies not only a deconstruction of precepts of Black cognitive incompetency, but a retrieval of the ways in which Black traditions of thought on empire and its afterlives – on a *communitas* of “familiar strangers” - might dispose us more adequately towards post-colonial futures, especially, now, when facing Brexit.

Current initiatives by staff, students and activists to decolonize the academy – built environment, personnel, institutional cultures and curricula – cannot be fairly assessed by reference to a fantastical ideal of higher learning abstracted and separated from empire's academic legacies. These initiatives should instead be contextualized and critically assessed *from* and *through* these legacies. There is a marked difference between the pursuit of impartiality as part of a project of reparative justice, and the pursuit of impartiality as a project of cultural-racial defense. One is no less political than the other. It might well be the case that those presently accused of debasing and vulgarizing the academic vocation are in fact its keenest defenders against precisely such degenerative – but persistent - dispositions.

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