"**A cumulative and alienating pattern of repeated slights and insults": Racism, Internationalization and Ethical Vacuity in UK Higher Education**

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Abstract

This paper critically examines Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) 2019 report into racism in United Kingdom Higher Education. After outlining the context of the report, the paper is situated within discourses of internationalization in higher education (HE)and those of investment, excellence and social mobility. Using transversality, an analytical tool developed by Gilles Deleuze, as a means of critiquing these connections, two groups of findings are presented. First, the report misrepresents the role of racism in HE as an isolated phenomenon rather than as an integral part of the discourse, logic and practices of internationalized HE. Specifically, it masks the discourses of investment, mobility and excellence that underpin it. Second, the report evidences, but fails to identify, the negative consequences of internationalization in higher education discourse. Specifically, discourses of investment, excellence and mobility are linked to the threat of decomplexification, securitization and, ultimately, ethical vacuity in HE.

Keywords: *higher education, racism, internationalization, transversality, discourse*

Introduction

The seemingly hyperbolic reference to a "cumulative and alienating pattern of repeated slights and insults" in this paper's title comes from a new report by the United Kingdom's Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). This paper analyses the report and its findings from the perspective of transversality, a concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as a tool for both critically challenging reductionist thinking and offering alternatives. This is intended to provide a novel perspective on an area with a long history of critique, notably through critical race theory discussed briefly below. A transversal critique of the EHRC report highlights two sets of findings. First, the representation by the EHRC of the role of racism in HE is considered, challenging its description as an isolated phenomenon unconnected to the wider logic and practices of internationalized HE. This misrepresentation is important because it hides three discourses that underpin it, namely those of investment, mobility and excellence. All three can be shown to form problematic– relations with the discriminatory treatment outlined in the EHRC report. Second, the report's failure to identify the negative consequences of internationalization is critiqued by referring to its own data and assertions. Referring back to the discursive triptych set out above, discourses of investment, excellence and mobility are connected to the threat of decomplexification, securitization and ethical vacuity in HE with the aim of showing how these reciprocally determining features constitute a complex relational system.

Since many of these relations are elided by the EHRC report, the potential efficacy of the latter is called into question. Racism is indeed a serious problem which, "will perpetuate through our society" (sic) if not "stamped out" (EHRC, 2019, p. 4). But given the wider policy context, the report's conflation of different experiences of racism – notably the deliberate equation of anti-white racism with the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME)[i] students

mentioned below - enact a deeper-seated and counterintuitive attempt to efface difference as part of a wider agenda. To show why and how this is the case, a brief background to the report's key findings will first provide some context for an initial analysis of its tacit connections to internationalization, a problematic notion discussed later. This will be followed by a discussion of what this means from the perspective of transversality, which is discussed in detail below.

The report

Launched in December 2018, and published on 23rd October 2019, "Universities Challenged"[ii] describes an unsettling degree of racial harassment in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The significance of the report lies partly in the credibility of its data. Collected from universities in England, Scotland and Wales, staff and students' experiences of racial harassment since the start of the 2015/16 academic year were sought. 141 out of 159 universities (89%) responded to an initial online survey. Desk-based research, round-table discussions and a random online survey of 1000 British students provided further quantitative and qualitative data. Focussing on direct experiences of harassment, 845 students and 571 staff responded.

Large numbers - 585 students (69%) and 378 staff (66%) - reported personal experiences of racial harassment (EHRC, 2019, p. 21), which equates to around13% of all students (EHRC, p.1). Such experiences are underscored by examples of verbal and physical threats and abuse.50% of staff described incidences of exclusion on racial grounds, and 20% of students complained of physical attacks. The "cumulative and alienating pattern of repeated slights and insults" no longer seems hyperbolic. It should, the report states, neither be "tolerated on campus" nor "part of [the HE] experience" (EHRC, 2019, p. 4). The report has already had an impact on a HE sector facing a challenging policy context. Demands for internationally competitive provision and ongoing

financial restraint run alongside industrial action on pensions, pay and, tellingly, equality (UCU, 2019a; 2019b). Some institutions quickly endorsed the report by detailing their own record in reducing this problem (e.g. University of Bristol, 2019; University of Sussex, 2019 *inter alia*).

Others, such as the National Union of Students criticise the report's conflation of different experiences of racism (Batty, 2019). On this view, the EHRC's deliberate equation of anti-white racism with the experiences of Black And Minority Ethnic (BAME) students and staff at University suggests a failure to understand – perhaps even a desire to brush over –these frequent examples of campus racism. Frequent reports of racist activity in UK Universities add to this picture of a widespread, persistent problem (recent examples include BBC, 2018; Coughlan, 2018; Burns, 2019; Guardian, 2019).

The report adds to such media attention and makes tough reading for UK higher education (UKHE). It is not, however, unique in its critique of such an environment in HE and is preceded by decades of study into the issue in education and beyond. The field of critical race theory (CRT), for instance, has developed significant critiques of concepts such as white privilege, colour-blindness and intersectionality (see for example Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995); Delgado and Stefancic (2012); Gillborn (2008; 2015; 2016). In both education and wider society, the impact of globalization, institutional racism, and deep-seated attitudes to racial difference expressed in recent policy on British "values", (im)migration and (counter) terrorism have all been extensively debated (see, for example, Law et al, 2004; Rizvi and Lingard (2010); Clark, C. (2011); Gillborn (2015); Smith; 2016; Bhopal, et al (2016); Bonilla-Silva (2017); Indelicato and Pražić (2019); Ash et al, 2020; Beighton and Revell, 2020).

Despite such study, the EHRC reports "significant under-reporting of student and staff experiences of racial harassment" (EHRC, 2019, p. 86 and *passim*). If racial harassment is "a common occurrence for many students and staff in British universities" (EHRC, 2019, p. 4), according to the report, HEIs are often unaware of its extent. Moreover, for the report, conflicts of interest exist in institutions which are keen to preserve their international brand image. This can lead to under-reporting and even manipulating complaints processes (EHRC, 2019, p. 86 and *passim*) reflecting the view that institutional racism remains the "dirty secret" behind UK Universities' marketing strategy (Sian, 2019, p. 2 see also Tate and Page (2018); Arday and Mirza, H.S. (2018).

However, the EHRC report also reflects the growing concern about racially-motivated discrimination in the HE sector and beyond. In 2014 a National strategy for access and student success was launched by the government of the time (BIS, 2014). Differences in the performance, outcomes and experiences, notably of BAME groups, were attracting sector attention (HEFCE, 2014) and continue to do so. This contested acronym, which here refers to Black and Minority Ethnic students, labels all non-white ethnic groups regardless of country origin or affiliation. Its essentially binary interpellation presents obvious drawbacks, not least because it minoritizes by conflating heterogeneous groups and individuals in unnecessarily reductive, even discriminatory, ways. It is nonetheless widely used by the UK HE sector, as we have seen (see also Stevenson et al, 2019)

In addition to this attention in strictly academic circles, increases in racist behaviour and hate crime in the UK generally have been identified by police, Universities, Students' Union, and the EHRC itself (EHRC, undated; Universities UK, 2016; NPCC, 2019; Universities UK and National Union of Students, 2019; Advance HE, 2019b). We are now at a "critical juncture"

(Zappettini and Krzyżanowski, 2019, p. 381) in which racist abuse is "becoming ever more public" and discrimination "increasingly normalised" in HE (NUS, 2019; see also Merrick and Gye, 2019).

Three points are worth stressing here. First, the fact that racism is so common is in itself troubling, but the EHRC reports many of examples of serious abuse. This is not a problem of 'casual racism', 'cultural insensitivity' or 'political correctness' but discriminatory harassment of an organized, premeditated and overtly abusive nature. Second, "pattern[s] of repeated harassment" (EHRC, 2019, p. 7) indicate racist behaviour at every level of university life. Students, academics and administrative staff all report incidences, implying the existence of a toxic environment *for all* (EHRC, 2019, pp.37 and 27). Third, the racism extends to many forms of exclusion on, for instance, religious or ethnic grounds. There are widespread examples of Islamophobia, anti-Semitic comments and threats; physical abuse, offensive comments about 'terrorists' and additional security checks for Muslim students also make depressing reading (EHRC, 2019, pp.26-28; 37). Racism, the report states, is more likely to occur in face-to-face teaching settings and on campus than online, which risks making Universities physically unsafe (EHRC, 2019, p. 96).

Among these findings, the responses of international students, a key demographic for university recruitment (see below), are instructive in that they show how the problem goes beyond racism *per se*. Often feeling "unwelcome, isolated and vulnerable" (EHRC, 2019, p. 28), these students describe being treated like commodities and "only wanted by universities for the fees they bring" (ibid). The EHRC agrees that such attitudes and practices risk "marginalis[ing] the problem as a race issue rather than an institutional one" (EHRC, 2019, p. 103). This division between race issues and their institutional counterpart is itself suggestive of a failure to see that the two are inseparable.

Indeed, the failure to see the links between questions of labelling, administration, policy and lived experience surely lie at the heart of the problem of on-campus racism.

Institutionalising the criticism, however, may serve to mask the real problem. If racist harassment is not an isolated institutional phenomenon, it cannot be tackled in isolation by individual institutions, particularly when the latter are wedded to a wider discursive agenda. To be clear: it is important to recognise that the problems reported by the EHRC must be understood in the context of wider discourses about what is ethically acceptable. Thus while it is true that individual institutions' policies and practices can go some way to tackling the problems highlighted by the EHRC, the wider context of internationalization must also be critically interrogated if local practices are to reflect ethically acceptable approaches. As the international students mentioned above, suggest, the internationalization of HE is a central part of this context. By juxtaposing some of the features of HE internationalization, we can see how the latter constitute a co-determining relationship with racism in HEIs, making it all the harder to challenge.

This paper starts therefore by briefly surveying the development of Internationalization in HE, before turning to the concept of transversality, drawing notably on the less well-known earlier work of Gilles Deleuze to do so. Two sets of connected points are made. First, discourses of investment, mobility and excellence are connected to that of internationalization. Second, the latter is linked to the phenomena of decomplexification, securitization and the extension of ethical vacuity in this context.

Internationalization

Universities "*are promoted as* places of freedom, open-mindedness and self-discovery" (EHRC, 2019, p. 4, my emphasis). As my emphasis shows, while the openness in question clearly refers to the kinds of freedoms of speech, thought and activity that are associated with HE, they serve, according to the EHRC, as promotional tools. They are thus inseparable from the tools and values of international competitivity and brand image. Internationalization, we are told, is "a high quality, *equitable* and global learning experience" aimed at preparing graduates for "a globally *interconnected* society" (Advance HE, 2019a – my emphases). The latter requires that HEIs develop systems and processes with which to compete for and attract students on the global market (see, for example Browne, 2010; BIS, 2016; Swist and Kuswara, 2016).

While subjected to the effects of globalization on a putative knowledge economy, universities are also active developers of cognitive capital and active promoters of the knowledge economy. Internationalization is thus a properly complex process, where HEIs, their staff and students are simultaneously both product and producer of globalizing effects (Beighton, 2018a). This reciprocal relationship between subject and object, producer and product is characteristic of non-linear complex environments. In the global knowledge economy, it means that the exportation of British education in its various forms maintains reciprocal (and therefore co-determining) relations with Internationalization. HEIs claim that this will bring more than financial security in challenging times. More democratic provision has indeed already transformed UK HEIs since the massification of HE in 1990s with more diverse, "non-traditional" student cohorts and the increased variety of learning needs and motivations they bring (Wingate, 2015; Barnett, 2017; Beighton, 2017; 2018b).

However, the EHRC warns that HEIs cannot guarantee these democratic ideals or even ensure personal safety, as we have seen. To see why, I'd like to look at three aspects of the discourse of Internationalization: investment, excellence and mobility

Investment, excellence mobility and in HE

a. Investment

"Investing in our education system is an investment in the future of our nation" (DFE, 2016, p. 3), a truism that also applies to internationalization's own financial speculation. HEIs are "factories of knowledge" (Raunig, 2013) and internationalization is self-investment in raw material (students) and productive capacity (cognitive capital). With increased international competition (BIS, 2015) the EHRC echoes the sector's need to "retain our slice of the global education market" (2019, p. 5). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the central mechanism for success is individual choice: choosing HE, choosing an institution, choosing a programme of study and how to finance it are all investment choices for which individuals are ultimately responsible (Beighton, 2016b; Brunila and Siivonen, 2016). It is striking, if unsurprising, that responsibility for such improvements lies with the individual's investment choices and the benefits these investments are expected to bring.

Thus, the EHRC report both includes and occludes key information. International students, we are told, know that institutions treat them as cognitive capital. What the report omits is that this commodification reveals another truism about internationalization in HE, namely that educational racism and internationalization are co-determiners: we are able to internationalize because we undervalue the Other, and we undervalue the Other because internationalization reduces higher learning to speculation in the cognitive economy. *In fine*, the staff and students who guarantee the flows of funds,

knowledge and "experience" (see, for example, EHRC, 2019, p. 5) in HE are *simultaneously* its raw materials and are treated as such. This is why HEIs actively protect staff who bring "prestige and funding" (EHRC, 2019, p. 91), but it also explains why they would manipulate complaints which might endanger the organizational brand.

So, when respondents in the report talk of commodification, they refer explicitly to their lack of agency in the knowledge economy. Rather than empower the individual, learning subjects are defined as the raw material of investment capital: to succeed, learners must become compliant elements of the HE assemblage, and ultimately no more than "a flow in the financial capitalist setup" (Cole and Gannon, 2017, p. 79). Early 21st century trickle-up replaces late 20th century trickle-down economics.

These powerful discourses and practices link regulatory mechanisms, marketing activity and particularly the need for security in complex assemblages. Increasingly sophisticated data farming technologies are integral to these assemblages, whose existence is largely virtual in this sense (see, for example, Zwick and Denegri-Knott, 2009; Coll, 2013; D'Hoest and Lewis, 2015; Raunig; 2016; Fahmy, 2017). Below, the question of security will be returned to, but this focus on flow first reflects the demands of a second key discourse within internationalization: mobility.

b. Mobility

The EHRC says that universities' business is not just to guarantee "dignity at work" (p. 87 and *passim)* but "nurture talent and potential" (p. 94). HEIs must engender "potential and progress" (EHRC, 2019, p. 102), because professional, geographical and social mobility is one of the bedrocks of internationalization (e.g. DFE, 2016, p. 6). Racism, however, blocks mobility flows, with people

"[l]eaving jobs or studies", being unable to "work collaboratively across disciplines", or "solve global challenges" (EHRC, 2019, pp. 4 & 7). This disrupts the concern for speedy outcomes, efficacious logistics and continued flows of students, data and international esteem. It is therefore unsurprising that mobility, for the EHRC too, demands that we "improve" faster, "find new ways forward", "progress" or show "forward thinking" rather than get "left behind" (EHRC, 2019, p. 4 and *passim*).

But mobility is more than just forward movement. When the report criticises racism's constraining of "the potential and progress of ethnic minority staff" (EHRC, 2019, p. 102), it reminds us that social mobility is also an investment in future human capital which must never stop exploiting this potential. Such language misrepresents the fact that the issue of mobility, like that of investment, is essentially collective and economic rather than simply a matter of individual progress or self-discovery. Mobility is a transversal phenomenon which recuses such singularities by implicating discourses of excellence, to which this paper now turns.

c. Excellence

The need to trumpet "excellence" in UK HE, according to the UK's Department for Education, is "everywhere" (DFE, 2016). Hence, a "Teaching Excellence Framework" (TEF), created in 2016, exists (rather tautologically) to "recogniz[e] excellent teaching" and provide "information to help prospective students *choose where* to study" (HEFCE, 2017, my emphasis).

Noting the continued emphasis here on individual mobility choices, the TEF wants "world class" HE provision with "Gold" standard institutions (BIS, 2016, p. 4). Creativity and innovation are usually given as the keys to this success, a view echoed by the EHRC:

> Higher education is a hotbed of innovation and learning that helps to drive Britain's economy at a time of great uncertainty, developing breakthroughs in science and technology and boosting our industries.
>
> (EHRC, 2019, p. 4)

Such speed-enraptured rhetoric seems rather fanciful. Can such "breakthroughs" enhance quality when austerity, globalization and consumption increasingly drive Internationalization in HE? Or do they demonstrate, once again, the feverish expansion of HE with its practices of rationalization, distribution and commodification, all underpinned by an incipient irrationality? Ritzer (2013) has suggested that HE policies and practices intended to increase quality by rationalizing cognitive capital development actually involve less efficiency. Lower predictability, less calculability and less control often actually result from such attempts: the racist academic environments, resulting from attempts to rationalize and internationalize may be a case in point.

However, while the EHRC report hints at this wider context, it cannot really tackle it. When it constantly refers back to the local level of mechanisms such as individual choice, the problem of racism is distanced from the wider issue of internationalization Transversality provides a more holistic analysis of the report's ambivalence in this regard. This means an engagement with questions of systemic complexity, complicity with securitization and a troubling degree of ethical vacuity.

Transversality

The concept of transversality is appropriate here because it exists to examine questions of diversity which are often occluded in analyses which conflate and homogenise disparate issues. Attributed originally to Jean-Paul Sartre (Bosteels,1998, p. 156) its subsequent adoption by Félix Guattari contributes to the latter's reputation as a controversial thinker (see Guattari, 1974).[iii]A

challenge to Freudian concepts of subjective unity, the transversal subject affirms difference and complexity instead of unity (i.e. the fantasy of consciousness defined by repetition and repression) in order to avoid the dualism of private versus public subconscious. In typical Guattarian terms, transversal connections, not unipolar ones, define the subject as a multiplicity (see Guattari, 1989, p. 142).

For Deleuze, transversality has even wider relevance and becomes particularly relevant to my analysis here. Our relations with a properly complex world are not hierarchical, linear or, properly speaking, subjective, but transversal (Deleuze, 2007, p. 194; see also Deleuze, 2002, p. 278). Transversality therefore illustrates the mechanics of Deleuze's own ontology where multiplicity operates, genetically, at the level of substance. If we are to take the complexity of our (global) environment seriously – as Deleuze thinks we should – we must question our own role within it as actors in and of complexity (Deleuze, 1968/ 1994). So, when knowledge is fabricated by moving *across* disparate terms rather than reproducing them, we are thinking transversally (Raunig, 2016, p.19). This means allowing the brain to operate "across fields, bringing them together in new ways" (Murphie, 2010, p. 28; see also Guattari, 1974; Guattari, 1989; Sarnel, 2007).[iv] But obstructing thought's operation by limiting experiences to existing concepts and recognisable experiences of an individualistic nature reproduces the hierarchy and the grounds used to justify and rationalize abusive relations with other people and things.

A failure to think transversally about the complex issues at hand undermines the EHRC report' s desire to counter racism on campus. Thinking transversality leads to the conclusion that racism and internationalization are co-determined, in complexity, by the same impulse to unify the othered "international" subject. This co-determination simultaneously denies diversity and (re) creates an object

of exclusion, rejection and even abuse. To clarify this point, three very concrete aspects of this co-determination are now tackled, with connections between investment and complexity; mobility and securitization; and excellence and ethical vacuity.

1. From investment to decomplexification

The EHRC's tendency to focus on local responses, suggested above, is understandable in globalization's "complex, overlapping, disjunctive order" (Appadurai, 1990, p. 296). Appadurai stresses disjunction here because the conditions of this complexity (micro-macro co-determination and their subsequent superposition) mean that causal relationships cannot be identified, still less manipulated, with real certainly.

But complex systems by definition tend to self-organization (see, for example, Prigogine and Stengers, 1986). Global tendencies take on local forms, and in so doing inflect both local and the global environments, admittedly often in small ways. Co-determination, where a reciprocal relationship between bodies pertains instead of a causal one, is a defining trait of this complex order. A persistent trend towards homogenization, in HE for example, is indeed likely when global competition self-organizes in adherence to immanent frameworks, often called attractor states. Perhaps the most pertinent of these is, appropriately enough, the feverish fascination with productive processes themselves: HE is a "hotbed of innovation" (see above) endowed with industrial-grade powers of technologically-enhanced innovation.

Harvesting growth from within and immanent productivity, these are "industries of creativity" (Raunig, 2013). They need staff whose "insight and innovation" should not be thwarted by racism (EHRC, 2019, p. 32). The report is therefore really just one example of a widespread exaltation of creativity and innovation

in education discourse (for other examples, see Beighton, 2015a *inter alia*). But the creativity in question is harnessed for the production of globally marketable product and preestablished financial goals. Its hyperbole thus mask the emptiness of the production-line of "nothing" products in 'McDonaldized' organizations.

George Ritzer (2003; 2013; 2014) is perhaps best known for this critique of McDonaldization, not least in HE, which obliterates a sense of value and meaning through mass rationalization of creative processes as latent source of (cheap) capital (Zajc, 2015; Beighton 2016a; Strom and Martin, 2017). Such marketized behaviour, known as prosumption, draws surplus value from consumer input rather than simply provide products for consumers ready-made. Suppliers engage (pro)consumers in developing the products they buy, harnessing consumers' latent creativity as a form of unpaid labour. For Ritzer, defining one's own 'student experience', or building course content by "innovating", "researching" or "reflecting" in HE are little more than euphemisms for the performance of course criteria by prosumers. They co-determine the experience because they willingly carry the production costs of learning themselves.

As such, they are not qualitatively different to emptying one's own fast-food restaurant tray, an icon whose form suggests its vacuous meaning. This is vacuity as decomplexification, or the annulling of the change embodied by complexity. The goal of prosumption, in learning and elsewhere, is to cut costs for the multinational. But it doesn't just happen. In an HE system where students and staff alike are assessed by their (re) production of creative outputs (see, for example, QAA, 2014) it requires management and must be administered. Guaranteeing the channels through which these outputs flow also requires what Bauman (2016) calls "securitization".

2. From Mobility to Securitization

HE's fascination with mobility is a transversal phenomenon because it maintains seemingly disparate links with fear, notably of disorder. For Bauman (2016), there is a politically expedient need to administer and manage a very specific conflation of fear and disorder. Contemporary states need to produce and control both through "securitization" so that they can shift anxiety about problems that they can't or won't handle onto those problems which they can be seen to tackle. Bauman thinks that this happens when both disorder and the fear of disorder are managed through a powerful assemblage of discourse, practice and tendencies. Crucially, the latter involves equating all that is foreign with disorder on one hand and a lack of protection from social degradation and the denial of dignity on the other. Both explicitly contravene the 2010 Equality act cited by the EHRC (2019, p. 23), but they exist for instance in attempts at "McCarthyist" governmental interference in HE (BBC, 2017).

It seems counterintuitive that mobility should be a means of ensuring securitization. Mobility, however, is highly codified. It demands adhesion and homogeneity while rejecting otherness and diversity because it has both orderly and disorderly forms. Orderly mobility (e.g. social mobility and human capital investment) must be secured from disorderly forms (e.g. migration). Discourses of mobility therefore create the conditions for blindness to the needs of the disorderly, the foreign, the financially uninteresting. Such degradations in academic environments reflect "blindness" of a systemic and systematic nature:

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

The point here is that assessments are clouded and pictures made unclear by the conditions of mobility: it is the discourse of mobility itself which homogenises populations by implementing systems designed to support mobility and capital flow rather than, for instance, specificity. The widespread use of the acronym BAME, referred to above, is one example, or the occasional blindness which "does not fully understand racial harassment (EHRC,2019, p. 8)". But HEIs "are [deliberately] not following guidance on how to handle complaints" (EHRC, 2019, p. 11); and see **"**little need to change their existing policies" (EHRC, 2019, p. 12). It is true that the report suggests using advisors and advocates as "listening ears" (sic) or neutral points of contact to facilitate communication about incidents (EHRC, 2019, pp. 54-55 and *passim*). But the need to enforce anti-racism policies is "rarely, if ever" discussed in HEIs (EHRC, 2019, p. 12). And such mediators may only mask vested interests in competitive internationalization, if, as the report says, HEIs "too often place their reputation above the safeguarding and welfare of their students and staff" (ibid). Threats to welfare might, on Bauman's analysis, actually be the securitized point.

This leitmotiv- a direct conflict between brand image control and ethical duty – is troubling in itself. But a role within wider discourses of educational excellence, however counterintuitive, is also indicated by such statements. This link – the imbrication of excellence and ethical vacuity- is the culminating feature of my transversal analysis.

3. From Excellence to Ethical Vacuity

The report's condemnation of harassment, exclusion and all forms of discriminatory behaviour is forthright and underpinned by many troubling examples. True, the HE sector "has been taking steps to better understand the harassment that goes on" (EHRC, 2019, p. 5). But the motivation for these steps

lies explicitly in the extension of internationalization: the report documents reluctant – if not actually disingenuous - institutional attempts to protect international reputations.

"Excellence" is perhaps the latter's most common euphemism, but its management through McDonaldization can create irrational effects. For instance, the manipulation of enquiries into racism on campus, about which "the majority of universities did not seek feedback" (EHRC, 2019, p. 10), has had the perverse effect of distorting the organization's ability to reach their own goals (see above: EHRC, 2019, p. 84). It is therefore striking but unsurprising that the solution to the apparent denial of the ethical duty to "stamp out" racism lies, for the report, in greater monitoring and further emphasis on process. Excellence, again, means regular reporting of incidences and analyses to senior management, governing bodies, staff and student organizations. This will, according to the EHRC "raise awareness" and "build the confidence of students and staff" in the transparency and effectiveness of procedures to deal with complaints (EHRC, 2019, p. 10).

Such transparency would, again, be laudable, if there were evidence that it will solve the problem rather than mask it. Instead of facilitating effective participation and openness, data-farming of the sort suggested by the EHRC (see also EHRC, 2019, pp. 88-90) has more to do with extending the market-driven culture of surveillance, reification, and flows of essentially empty knowledge than with any ethical conviction (Beighton, 2016a). Only data can "determine whether or not their processes are fit for purpose and improving over time" (EHRC, 2019, p. 90). Inquiry into incidents, according to the EHRC, can resemble a data-circus of reporting, analysis and compliance whose gaze starts and ends with its own procedures and self-image. Even where complaints were upheld, fear of breaching data protection rules prevented some universities

from informing the complainant, fostering a "lack of meaningful enforcement" (EHRC, 2019, pp. 10-11).

The ethical vacuity implied here is predictable. The focus on process may be a common aspect of managerialism in HE, but such 'tick box' managerialism promises little real change (Bhopal and Henderson (2019, p.4). Literally essential to the economy of "nothing" products, it is a recurring and troubling feature of management systems' disregard for products themselves, which, after all, can be vacuous, trivial, or both. The ethical emptiness which ensues from this levelling of difference helps explain why the report sees no difference in the experience of racial harassment of white and non-white students (see Batty, 2019 above).The systematic adoption of the principles and demands of internationalization also helps explain why in such cases, institutions are able to water down complaints, manipulate tribunal results and escape admissions of liability which might damage their international reputation (EHRC, 2019, p. 83).

It is also characteristic of a credo where macroeconomic phenomena are "simply an aggregation of individual actions" (Pühringer and Griesser, 2019, p. 10). Relying on a belief in the agency of a subject able and willing to make choices, the report stresses the *lack* of choice for victims of racial harassment. Individual choices, and choices by individuals, doubtless matter to students as consumers of an education market. But why an organization would place such choice above the lack of confidence in its complaints system is not clear. However, if the institution's marketing goals trump the ethical claims of complainants, we begin to understand why no proactive duty to prevent harassment exists (EHRC, 2019, p. 80). There is no legal or commercial incentive to go beyond the letter of the 1998 Human Rights Act, which requires public bodies to "respect and protect a set of fundamental rights and freedoms

that everyone in the UK is entitled to" (EHRC, 2019, p. 109). Thus, a university may well be legally entitled to decide that that the cost and disruption involved in tackling racism might "outweigh the potential positive effect of the measure under consideration" (EHRC, 2019, p. 81), when this is clearly ethically wrong.

On this view, it is not that HEIs disregard the dignity of the "minoritized "populations in question, but rather that internationalization lacks capacity for ethical choice in cases of individual or even collective well-being. Returning to Bauman's analysis, this is an example of securitization's goal: annulling complexity and disorder in order to entrench "those up there" (Bauman, 2016, p. 28). The latter claim moral authority from on high while denying ethical responsibility: a typical move (Beighton, 2016a). The quest for the former forecloses the latter, ushering in the negative consequences detailed in the report.

Transversal findings

The EHRC report sends a powerful message: discourse does not exist in isolation from its material effects and affects. For example, rather than simply a set of words, phrases or ideas, a report such as this vehicles "order words" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1976/2004b). A "mot d'ordre" is not just a metaphor for something else, or even an instruction or command, but rather a (secret) watchword which binds a group within a single motive or project. Often, it does so through affective means: anti-racist rhetoric, however laudable, is a case in point. As a slogan, it exists not to simply direct and instruct, but to establish hierarchical channels of communication between sovereign subjects which govern the information flow between them. Thus, a text such as the EHRC report does not just (or even) inform us about the state of racism in HE, but rather binds the reader to itself as author, authority and authorization of a specific set of views: an assemblage. In this case the demarcation between racist

practices and those of internationalization, which a transversal analysis dismantles, is enshrined.

Transversality also reminds us that it is not enough to condemn racism when academic discourse and pedagogy are co-determined by ethically vacuous views, practices and policies. Thus, referenced by the EHRC report, micro-aggressions are repeatedly condemned. They are often "subtle and insidious" and their effect is to leave the victim "confused, distressed and frustrated" (EHRC, 2019, p. 24). But the legal requirement to avoid such distress in the first place is at best moot, and redress might only be obtained by "breach of contract" between the Institution and the Complainant as legal, rather than human, bodies (ESRC, 2019, p. 110). Institutional racism, here, is a question of process and a legal contract with no overt ethical interest or responsibility. This may well be why micro-aggressions are so often viewed as "isolated incidents" instead of the "cumulative and alienating pattern of repeated slights and insults" (EHRC, 2019, p. 29).

Specifically, a transversal analysis suggests that, in the interests of internationalization and the development of the UK HE brand, international students are (re)defined as defective counterparts of the ideal student by an assemblage of decentred administrative processes, dehumanizing technologies and order words. Thus, while the report claims that micro-aggressors are often "oblivious of the offense they have caused" (sic) (EHRC, 2019, p. 24), a transversal analysis would suggest that this obliviousness to difference is systemic. As such, it is distributed rather than concentrated in individuals or institutions. However, the EHRC's focus is clearly on the activities of individual universities, or, at best, responses by a sector's investment in the internationalization agenda. Even the report's more optimistic declarations still convey an underlying individualism: students should not "start their

independent lives" this way and so the "brightest minds" should "work collaboratively across disciplines" to solve global challenges and, naturally, discover themselves in the words of the report (EHRC, 2019, p. 4).

It would be churlish to deny that both individual and collective responses are needed. But the report's focus on racism as a hindrance to *national* competitivity is telling. By highlighting the issue's "national importance" and its guidance to "Governments across Britain" (EHRC, 2019, pp.4 and 14), it neglects the fact that racial tensions in HE constitute a wider issue. It is a global problem for both Thomas (2019) and Indelicato and Pražić (2019), who critique a specifically western model of internationalization as a "social imaginary" where "differential valuation of humanity" is not a result but a necessary *condition* of economic affluence, universal knowledge and state-guaranteed security (op.cit. p. 296). Universities must certainly "understand the scale of the issue" (EHRC, 2019, p. 5), but without real examination of the epistemological environment in which racism is engendered, anti-racist action may prove fruitless or even counterproductive.

Conclusion

This paper links the internationalization agenda in UK HE to the racism recorded in institutions by the recent EHRC report. Transversality can challenge this assumption and work as both a diagnostic tool and a way of making new connections in a context in sore need of change. When racist harassment is complicit with the demands of internationalization in HE, we need to ask whether a discourse which creates the conditions of racism in HE has the capacity to solve the problem that the EHRC report rightly denounces. Noting and interrogating disparate or counterintuitive connections by thinking transversally about their development is an intentionally ethical move: it identifies priorities (people rather than process), distinguishes higher order

problems (ethics rather than moralistic outrage), and avoids category errors (mistaking causes for effects).

Thinking transversally, however, will only happen as a result of a violent encounter with signs, in this case of widespread racial discrimination. A discomforting nomadism in thought, language and practice is a necessary condition of transversal connections and of a better understanding of the disavowed complicity between racism and internationalization. And while a failure to think and act transversally is a sure sign of an inability to learn, a transversal analysis insists that there is nothing inevitable about the kinds of practices highlighted by the EHRC report.

Notes

[i]Although commonly used in contexts such as this, the term "BAME" has long been contested, not least for its tendency to "pigeonhole" heterogeneous groups and reinforce a white/ non-white binary that fails to account for a much the more complex reality of identity in society such as the UK.

[ii] The title puns on the name of a UK TV quiz show for reasons not elucidated by its authors.

[iii] Guattari (1930-1992) is perhaps best known to UK education researchers for his collaboration(s) with Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972/2004a ;1975/1986 ; 1976/ 2004b ; 1991/ 1994) before the untimely death which preceded Deleuze's own defenestration in 1995.

[iv] It is noteworthy (for Deleuze) that the term also plays a key role in *In search of Lost Time* to describe character changes over time (Proust, 1988; 1990 and *passim*).

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