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Christine Winter

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The geography GCSE curriculum in England: a white curriculum of deceit

Christine Winter

School of Education, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

ABSTRACT

The Black Lives Matter movement has increased attention paid to whiteness and education. This paper contributes to this attention by investigating epistemologies of Geography and their enactment in two 'multicultural' schools. Through textual analysis, lesson observations and interviews with GCSE Geography students and teachers, I inquire into the discourses of whiteness in the Geography GCSE topic of 'Global Development'. Analysis showed three main technologies at work: 'Dividing the World', '"Race", Whiteness and Colour-blindness' and 'Performativity'. The geography curriculum promoted an 'us' and 'them'/'white' and 'Black' narrative, with which students and teachers complied to achieve target grades. Students' in-school and out-of-school narratives conflicted. Teachers avoided or deflected the latter by prioritising their 'professional responsibilities' to teach white knowledge. The findings deepen understanding of the constituent elements of whiteness in education more generally and in Geography specifically. I conclude by offering hope for the future.

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Introduction

During a period of growing demographic, cultural and social change globally, school teachers in England serve students of increasingly diverse religious, ethnic and cultural identities (UK Gov 2020). In 2005 Gillborn argued that 'race inequity and racism are central features of the education system' (p.498), and more recently the global Black Lives Matter movement has drawn further attention to systemic racism. Yet, the British Government denies the existence of institutional racism (Sewell 2020) and claims that 'Our curriculum does not need to be decolonised, for the simple reason that it is not colonised' (Badenoch 2020, col. 1011).

This situation is significant for all teachers, particularly teachers of Humanities subjects in English schools, with school History as an obvious target. David Olusoga states: 'the way that history is taught in schools and universities is telling half a story' (cited in Akbar 2016). School Geography, however, has only recently figured as a target of criticism, since the subject's contribution to institutional racism has been veiled. Yet, Geography's legacy of colonialism is acknowledged (Livingstone 1992) and its whiteness raising concerns across USA and UK Universities where staff and students pose the

CONTACT Christine Winter c.winter@sheffield.ac.uk

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question 'why is my curriculum so white?' (Domosh 2015; Esson 2018). In UK Higher Education, the 'white' curriculum is said to contribute towards the 'awarding' gap[1] between black and white[2] students (Equality Challenge Unit 2015).

UNESCO (2010) recognises the prevalence and dangers of ethnocentric bias in school textbooks. In England, school Geography's 'Eurocentrism' is well documented (Hicks 1981; Morgan and Lambert 2001; 2003; Lambert and Morgan 2011). Under the high-stakes performative agenda in English schools, with school funding cuts and excessive workloads, teachers experience acute pressures to teach Government prescribed knowledge contained within General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE)[3] specifications, in order to raise standards of student attainment. This focus deflects attention from controversial political issues like 'race' (Joseph-Salisbury 2020), leaving teachers little time, energy or motivation for critical curriculum development and pedagogy. Meanwhile, 'framing' the world through school geographical knowledge has tangible psychological effects on how students and teachers understand themselves, their heritages, their relationships and their worlds (Winter 2018).

This study concentrates on the topic of 'global development' as it richly illustrates the power and nuances of school Geography's whiteness. The research questions are: 1) what narratives of global development are found in school texts? 2) what narratives of global development are held by students and teachers? 3) How do school narratives learned by students relate to those learned out-of-school? and 4) how do teachers negotiate tensions between those narratives? I investigated a popular Geography GCSE specification, and its enactment in two schools in 2018–2019 by inquiring into Geography's epistemologies, texts and interpretations by students aged 14–17 and their teachers. Beginning with the literature on whiteness and colour-blindness, I next think through Geography, 'race' and whiteness, and decoloniality. After presenting the study methodology, I discuss participants' perspectives on teaching and learning about global development in GCSE Geography under three recurring themes which were generated through the research questions and analysis: 'Dividing the World', '"Race", Whiteness and Colour-blindness' and 'Performativity'. In the concluding comments I return to the research questions and offer evidence of resistance. Mindful of the racialised politics of citation, I have tried throughout to cite key work by Black scholars in a predominantly white discipline.

Theoretical ideas guiding the study

Whiteness and colour-blindness

'Race' is a social and political construction, invented by and for white people to control and manage the lives of differently-racialised groups. The idiom, 'race is real, race ain't real' (Leonardo 2009, p.41) refers to 'race' having no genetic or biological foundation, but having 'real' effects which are manifest in racial inequality and injustice. Whiteness, then, as systematic racialised knowledge, identifies and reproduces the interests of white people to maintain and extend its effect. Gillborn describes whiteness as: denial of or unwillingness to name itself (ie colour-blindness); 'whiteness-as-the-norm', and historical amnesia or forgetting the central role of whiteness in justifying and excusing historical and contemporary injustice (Gillborn 2005, p.488). Leonardo aptly, in the case of Geography, describes 'racial worldmaking that is whiteness' (Leonardo 2009, p.9).

Colour-blindness, by denying, dismissing, silencing or ignoring the 'race' frame (Frankenberg 1993), deflects accusations of racism to allow it to continue in hidden form. As a cultural practice, a colour-blind curriculum embeds white epistemologies within its knowledge architecture and reinforced through its texts. By seeming not to notice or address 'race', racist structures are sustained through arguments of neutrality, factuality and absence of racial bias (Alexander 2012, p.203). White curriculum epistemologies, however, are not invisible to everyone. Surfacing as 'racial microaggressions', these are '. . . subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns . . . ' against Black people (Pierce 1995, p.281), whilst seeming harmless to some, bear a psychic power that operates as a disciplining practice driving the internalisation of white norms. Doharty (2018) recounts the violence of racial microaggressions in the school History classroom. I investigate their operation in school Geography.

White knowledge constructions are expressions of white supremacy. White supremacy rests on the belief that white people are superior to people of colour (Pulido 2017, p.812). In line with this belief, greater rewards and power are accrued by white people so as to 'maintain and reproduce their systematic advantages' (Bonilla-Silva 2001, p.22). White supremacy is not confined to neo-nazi or extreme political groups or individuals, but, echoing Gilroy's 1992 claim, it continues to lie at the heart of British society, operating in both conscious and unconscious ways through the daily enactment of white-dominated structures and processes. In the context of the school Geography curriculum, processes of white supremacy surface in the form of colour-blindness, erasure of history and the racialised hierarchisation of places and people. Neoliberalism plays a role here, by 'repackaging' white supremacy through a post-race frame, in which structural racism is denied and racialised failure is blamed on personal, family or cultural flaws (Inwood 2014, p.415).

Geography, 'race' and whiteness

Livingstone's seminal 1992 work, together with (Godlewska and Smith's 1994) edited collection illuminate Geography's white colonial past, the legacy of which prevails today. According to Bonnett (1997), during the mid-1990s, white geographers began to study the geography of 'race', but neglected to adopt a self-critical reflexive stance on their own white gaze. In other words, they racialised as 'non-white' the people under study, without attention to their own racialisation as white and the power that conferred. Thus, the essentialisation of 'race' as 'other than white' was reproduced through a colour-blind perspective (Kobayashi and Peake 2000, p.398). Since the 1980s, whiteness scholarship has addressed such issues, revealing the complex, multiple, intersecting experiences involved in identity-formation, on the basis of gender, place, age and ethnicity (Frankenberg 1993; Kobayashi and Peake 1994; Mahtani, 2004) and historical-spatial-political forms of whiteness (Bonnett 2000). But the 'significant discursive silence' (Kobayashi and Peake 2000, p.397) around 'race' and white supremacy continues to ply its work in reproducing racial hierarchisation in contemporary geography education. Decoloniality addresses this discursive silence.

Decoloniality

Decolonial geographers argue that Western geographers bear the responsibility to study places and people from outside the frame of white, western modernity by focusing on alternative, overlooked epistemologies and the ethics, politics and practices of the marginalised. (Grosfoguel 2007, 2016; Asher 2013; Mignolo 2009; Radcliffe 2017a; Jazeel 2017). Decolonial studies emphasise the subject and location of enunciation, that is, the specific situated knowledges, lived experiences and power positions of the subject. Relations of power are strongly linked to colonialism, giving rise to what Quijano refers to as the 'coloniality of power', and in turn, coloniality of power is framed by racialisation, since 'race' is used as a social classification system under Eurocentrism to differentiate between so-called 'superior' and 'inferior' populations (2000, p. 217; 2007, p. 171). Mignolo (2010, p. 124) recognises that in a culturally diverse world increasingly dominated by capitalism, experiences of colonialism and racialisation are ubiquitous. Decolonisation encourages social movements that are both similar in their experiences of global colonial domination, yet different in their local politics, epistemologies and religions. He describes such movements as 'decolonial cosmopolitanism' in a 'pluriversal' world. The idea of 'de-linking' from Eurocentrism (Mignolo, 2010, p. 125) is important here, as social groups extricate themselves from colonial epistemologies by developing place-based activism, founded on local cultural practices and politics.

Thus decoloniality looks at both the 'bigger picture' of the influence of colonialism, and the 'smaller picture' of particular histories and lived experiences of people in specific geographical contexts. Noxolo (2017) and Radcliffe (2017b) recognise this is an important task for geographers, given the prevalence of white supremacy in geographical knowledge production, and the discipline's lack of attention to racialisation. But focusing only on decolonising epistemology is not enough, the material effects of colonialism need to be addressed, as well as a critique of institutional policies and practices steeped in colonial relationships and violence towards racialised groups (Esson et al. 2017). Given the dominance of the white colonial gaze in school Geography, decolonisation forms a theoretical framework and methodology for critiquing school knowledge through students' and teachers' lived experiences.

Yet, Derickson's refrain about the 'unbearable whiteness of geography' (Derickson 2017, p.236) continues to echo through the discipline. Statistically, far fewer Black people teach and learn Geography in universities in the UK, and an 'awarding'[4] gap exists whereby Black Geography students graduate with proportionately lower grades than their white peers (Desai 2017). Take-up by Black students of GCSE geography in the UK increased 2010–2018, but decreased for 'A'-level and under-graduate geography (Brace and Souch 2020). Racial dynamics in university Geography Departments in the US are described as 'traumatic' (Joshi, McCutcheon, and Sweet 2015) and (Kobayashi 1999; Berg 2012) report on marginalisation, alienation and subordination felt by Black university students.

These manifestations of white geography today are symptomatic of a discipline haunted by its colonial past. Geography is not simply a way of describing the world and the place of 'race' in it, but a discourse through which 'race' and the world are constructed (Kobayashi 2014). Imperial geographers 'discovered', mapped, differentiated, named and claimed spaces and 'races' on the basis of essentialised political notions informed by colonial thought. In so doing, they contributed to geographical knowledge characterised by whiteness, patriarchy, Eurocentrism, heterosexuality and classism (McKittrick 2006, p.xiv). Essentialised notions of whiteness form:

> . . . the basic template for structuring human relations through their discursive inscription of every human action and thus, act to contour relations of power' (Kobayashi 2003, p. 550).

Those relations of power manifest through the super-structure of racial neoliberalism. Racial neoliberalism involves the active production of racialised bodies by the mutual constitution of 'race' and capitalism. Racism is not an inevitable result of neoliberalism, nor vice versa, instead, technologies of 'race' and neoliberalism intermix to govern the discursive construction and regulation of 'race' in society (Roberts and Mahtani 2010). This process is aptly illustrated in the way the neoliberal education system in England, driven by accountability and competition, constructs, controls and monitors racialised knowledge regimes in schools.

One such racialised knowledge regime, 'global development' in Geography GCSE, forms the focus of this project. Although the school curriculum masquarades as a politically neutral assemblage of knowledge, 'it is predominantly constitutive of the knowledge and values of particular interest and power groups' (Kanu 2009, p.5). Racialisation is sustained by the discipline's history and knowledge brokers (Department for Education (DfE), Ofqual, teacher education and geography researchers, examination boards, subject associations, textbook writers and publishers) who constitute the subject for schools. Many teachers (not just Geography teachers), declare a lack of confidence and knowledge to respond critically to issues about 'race' in the classroom (Bryan and Bracken 2011), and researchers point to the colour-blind teacher training policy, curriculum and practice, both at initial and in-service stages (Joseph-Salisbury 2020). Yet schools are a key location for the constitution of racialised identities via policies, curricula and pedagogies shrouded in colonial values and attitudes.

Recent critiques of Geography's racialised knowledge configuration in school curricula include Puttick and Murrey (2020), Milner (2020), Milner, Robinson, and Garcia (2021) and Winter (2018). This current paper makes a unique contribution to the field by engaging with the perspectives of those marginalised in the debate about Geographical knowledge, that is those the curriculum is supposed to serve – students and teachers. In effect, my study deploys a decolonising methodology to explore participants' experiential knowledge of white school Geography.

There are risks associated with challenging the subject's white power. Derickson cautions that focusing on racialised oppression may have unintended effects of fetishising black suffering and victimhood and deflect attention from strategies of resistance (Derickson 2017). Nayak (2011) warns of romanticising politics of identity discourses of Black Geography when the stakes of premature death as a result of racialisation are so high. And for white geographers like me, a constant self-critically reflexive lens needs to be applied to 'whites telling stories of people of colour' (Pulido 2002, p.45). Serious political and ethical dangers reside for white geographers researching whiteness. We must question ourselves about off-loading colonial guilt, smugly assuming 'I'm good because I'm doing anti-colonial work' (Mahtani 2014, p.364), whilst interrogating our complicity and privilege in institutional cultures of discrimination (Berg 2012, p.509). Acknowledging and researching whiteness do not remove it – more Black geographers and more political activism are needed for that. Although currently, whiteness undergoes powerful critique in the research community, the GCSE geography curriculum has not embraced such a stance. This deficit is a key focus of this article.

Methodology

Two schools responded positively to invitations distributed to twenty ‘multi-cultural’ co-educational secondary schools. The project design took three forms: document analysis, observation and interview. Full ethical approval was obtained from the University of Sheffield Ethics Committee 01–11-2018 (Reference 023173). Preliminary work focused on textual analysis of DfE and Ofqual[5] GCSE policies, examination specifications, questions, mark schemes and teaching materials. I observed eight global development lessons in each school taught by the Heads of Geography and was given access to all resources. An adapted version of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS 2001) observation framework was used to guide the observations because it included the configuration and transactions of knowledge during lessons. Observations were not analysed systematically but, together with informal discussions with teachers, formed an important backdrop and informed the analysis. Individual interviews were conducted with each Head of Geography plus one other geography teacher in each school who taught GCSE global development. Eight students racialised as Black and 12 as white volunteered to be interviewed (10 from each school). All interviews were semi-structured, including pilots.[6] Following preliminary analysis, findings were discussed with students, parents, governors and teachers (both those involved directly in the project and others), at analysis/impact workshops in each school.

Research methodology is concerned with reflecting critically on one’s choice of methods and their evaluation. Participatory, decolonising methods were chosen as best-fitting an investigation into whiteness and school geography. Textual deconstruction, informed by Derrida (1976) and developed during the interrogation of a 2013 Geography GCSE textbook (Winter 2018) was applied to the curriculum texts (Research question 1). It consists of four-steps: identifying assumptions; investigating and transgressing modernist tropes and generating ethical responses. An ethnographic approach was adopted for the remaining research questions to try to understand participants’ taken-for-granted assumptions. Researcher positionality (Clarke et al. 2019, p. 6), was closely monitored by critically reflexive self-checking, confidential discussion with trusted colleagues and presenting to different audiences where significant insights were raised which informed the analysis.

Interview and workshop data was analysed using (Braun and Clarke’s 2014) thematic approach. Themes were identified over six distinct stages through the identification of patterns, as analysis of teacher and student interviews was initially conducted separately, then combined and codes were merged and refined before and after the workshops. Participant names and schools were anonymised at transcription stage and in the analysis to follow, letters denote pseudonyms, pre-fixed by ‘S’ (student) or ‘T’ (teacher).

Three intersecting broad themes relating to the topic of global development were generated from the textual, interview and workshop analyses: dividing the world; ‘race’, whiteness and colour-blindness and performativity. For each theme or sub-theme and wherever data is available, I present the school text narratives (research question 1), the student and teacher narratives (questions 2 and 3) and finally, I address research question 4, how teachers negotiate the tensions between school and out-of-school narratives.

Dividing the world

Comparison and simplification

In both case study schools, statistical indicators of 'development' (such as Gross National Income (GNI), Literacy Rates, Doctors per 1,000 population) were used to compare features of Low and High Income Countries (LICs and HICs) at extremes of the range. This device of comparison, applied to extreme cases, emphasises stark differences in country characteristics. One student said:

> … in GCSEs, certainly, it's comparisons all the time … And an easy comparison is, you know, a Western country and an African country because they are so contrasting. SP[7] p14-15.

When asked why comparison between LICs and HICs was used, students suggested: 'Because they're showing the difference. They're showing what HICs have and what LICs don't' (SF p.4) and 'You just get they are lower than the HICs. They're not good enough or stuff like that' (SK p.3). Teachers echoed this view:

> … we do spend time in lessons saying that this country is really poor, look how bad it is … but then we're going to compare it to a HIC and look how great it is here … I think a lot of the geography GCSE is taught from a HIC point of view and a Western point of view, that this is how we developed. This is what you should do. This is how you should develop TE.

Teacher D identified the binary as 'straightaway you get the us and them feeling' and 'I guess that's where the white part of the curriculum comes in'. Both students and teachers explained the purpose of comparison and simplification as clarity, ease of understanding and content reduction in an overcrowded curriculum, but one student identified the reductive features of such an approach, arguing that Geography should teach students about 'everything, and not just the easy bits to explain' SQ p.8–9. In a similar vein, a History teacher argued that if extreme examples of countries at each end of the 'development' spectrum are compared using simple statistical indicators, '"all the good stuff" gets missed out'. She added: 'it [simplification] takes the vibrancy out of it. It makes it very sterile to teach' (TF p.4).

Such reductive statistical comparisons produce 'discursive homogenisation' (Escobar 1995), which erase countries' rich and unique characteristics, obscure their histories and silence indigenous voices. Comparison of extremes promotes a Western economic model of global development underpinned by the 'West is Best' discourse (Hall 1992), together with racialisation. This racialisation, perpetrated through comparison and simplification, gives a clue to how whiteness differentiates and allocates value. This point was evident as long ago as the 1980s (See Wright 1983, p.12).

Resilience and benevolence

The second sub-theme, resilience and benevolence, played a major part in students' perspectives on LICs. An image used in a lesson showed a group of smiling Black children, who, from their dress and surroundings were living in poverty. Several students picked out this image and responded to it in a similar way when asked: ‘What do you think when you see these pictures?’

> How people are struggling and by little things they just get happy. I don’t know how to say it but they’re struggling but they’re still carrying on with their life. They’re still happy the way they are, the kids there. Even if you’re struggling you can still carry on and do what you’re doing and just don’t give up. And to support them by raising money SF p.2

Teacher B also commented on the resourcefulness of people living in poverty in LICS when he said: ‘I showed them a great video about a very charismatic woman in Calcutta recycling plastic, making a great go of it – she’s very positive’ (p.7–8). Several students expressed their feelings of sadness, discomfort and guilt when discussing LICs. One said: ‘Why am I complaining?’ (SF p.4), and another used the word ‘suicidal’ to convey the depth of his emotions. Many supported the action of HICs donating money to LICs to help them to develop, for example, Teacher B identified the moral duty of HICs ‘to help people in less fortunate situations’ (p.1) and of teachers, in particular, who are duty-bound to:

> . . . make students aware they’ve got some responsibility - the things they can do to help. The impact of their lifestyle beyond their own house. Try to get them to think about them as having a bit of social responsibility (p.2).

Only one student mentioned LIC self-help, saying:

> But a lot of it I think is how Westerners could go in, help other people and how TNCs [Trans-National Companies] and stuff could help countries. We haven’t talked that much about how individual countries can actually help themselves (SM p.2).

Student and teacher admiration for the resilience of people living in LICs raises several issues. The first is the ‘poor-but-happy storyline’ (Simpson 2004), that assumes that people living in LICs are not overly concerned about living in poverty. Thus poverty is essentialised, trivialised, romanticised (Bryan and Bracken 2011, p.106), and depoliticised. Other issues relate to the construction of otherness, alleviation of guilt and reinforcement of the complex binaries of ‘us/them, capable/incapable, normal/lacking’ (Jefferess 2012, p.37/8). Wrapped up in these moralising discourses is white benevolence, ‘the white man’s burden’, that is, the duty of the European to save ‘the savage primitive other’ (ibid, p. 30). White benevolence constitutes whiteness by hiding racial hierarchisation from view. Under the veil of empathy, pity and charity, the logics of care obfuscate the logics of white supremacy (Pallister-Wilkins 2021), feed white innocence (Oroxco 2019) and consolidate whiteness within the Western neoliberal power framework. Schulz describes how benevolence reproduces the racial order of hegemonic whiteness by ‘extending the system of disciplinary control over bodies, minds and souls’ (Schulz 2011, p.209). Except for mention of LIC self-help by a student, global political relations sustaining LIC poverty and the constitution of racialised subjectivities were ignored.

‘Race’, whiteness and colour-blindness

Despite its status as a social and political construct lacking scientific credibility, the concept of ‘race’ manifests as a persistent and pervasive influence in the global development topic in both schools. Colour-blind texts, omitting to refer explicitly to 'race', at the same time reify it through recurring stereotypes, country comparisons and selective historical amnesia, reproducing racialised difference and normalising whiteness (Bryan 2012). One student asked 'Why is Geography got to do with race as such? Because we're not looking at race, because that would be like, Sociology' (SR p.17–18). Another spoke, haltingly, of the problem:

> I think it's [the geography curriculum] very - not meaning to make a pun or anything - but very black and white, as to categories . . . That maybe we should avoid categorising as much as possible, when it's going to reach a wide audience and when it's going to influence particularly children, and how they see themselves. If you're a young African, or you're a young child with African heritage, and all these pictures are showing people who . . . I don't want to say . . . that look like you. It immediately gives your classmates as well, a kind of . . . I would hope that it wouldn't be like that, but almost like a prejudice. Like people's backgrounds. And I think that when people are so easily influenced, and at that stage in their life, I think it's dangerous. SQ p.5-6.

Students' disavowel of geography's interest in 'race' and reluctance to articulate the word 'race' or 'Black' demonstrate effects of the colour-blind curriculum. Yet student Q's recognition of the danger of implicit racial categorisation in the geography curriculum shows an ability to critically analyse the implications of colour-blindness. In the next two sub-sections I discuss colour-blind discourses embedded within two geography GCSE texts. The first is a GCSE examination question.

'War against terrorism'

A pie chart depicts the 'push' and 'pull' factors involved in population migration from rural to urban areas in 'a region of Pakistan'. The largest 'slice' of the pie denoting the 'push' from the rural areas and coloured red[8] is labelled 'War against terrorism'. As this topic is not referenced in the examination board specifications, teachers in the two case study schools did not teach it, so students' knowledge of the concept would have been gained from outside school. This examination question demonstrates colour-blindness as discussed earlier (p. x), in the sense that the 'race' frame is ignored, racialised knowledge is normalised and historical contexts are erased. Moreover, hidden white epistemologies are at work through the seemingly 'objective' data and figure. But this white knowledge was not hidden from everyone. Students held different views. One said 'People stereotype every Muslim to be a terrorist' SR p.11, and another said that when we [Muslims] hear 'terrorism', we automatically assume that other people are viewing us negatively' ST p.9. Some students commented that, under time pressure, they wouldn't have noticed the implicit message, but another suggested that the question's bias 'can just completely put off what the exam question's actually asking you to do'. One student asked about the ethnicity of the examiners who write the questions, another commented: 'we don't really have many [Muslims] who do geography . . . questions like this would probably put me off. (SS p.7–9).

This examination question conjures, for some students an Islamophobic narrative recurring through public consciousness in England and resonating through critical studies of enactment of the Prevent policy across a range of public services (See Younis and Jadhav 2019, for the NHS). Underpinning the GCSE question is the connection between security and education, and at work here is not only a 'disciplinary logic of whiteness' (Hesse 1997, p.99), but also one of anti-Muslim sentiment (Winter 2018, p.88). Operating as a tool of the state, the question constitutes both 'race'- and Islam-as-threats, thereby according with state attempts to securitise, govern and control Muslim communities (Heath-Kelly 2013). In his definition of racism Grosfoguel (2016) theorises the case of Islamophobia as an entanglement between the markers of colour and religion in 'the materiality of domination' (p.11). He draws on Fanon's (1967) 'line of the human', which demarcates between people as human, with human rights, material resources and recognition of their identities (above the line) and those denied these capitals, as sub- or non-human (below the line). Grosfoguel's point is that diverse forms of social hierarchisation exist in different geographical areas of the world, constructed, not only through colour, but through a variety of racial markers of 'colour, ethnicity, language, culture and/or religion' (p. 10). Absence of such theorisation and of historical and political contextualisation allows recourse to public consciousness and the oppression of Muslim students. These racialising-religious oppressions, built into the colonial curriculum, serve as an everyday reminder to Muslim students of white supremacy (Leonardo 2009, p. 49).

Colonialism

The second example of a racialised discourse appears in a GCSE geography text book currently used in both schools:

> . . . . By the end of the 19th century much of Africa and parts of South America and Asia had been divided up between the European superpowers. Countries such as the UK, Germany, Spain and France had powerful empires and colonies. Since 1950 former European colonies have gained independence. In many cases this has been a difficult process, resulting in civil wars and political struggles for power. Money has been spent on armaments and some governments have been corrupt. This political instability has held back development
>
> (Rowles et al, 2016, p.203).

This paragraph appears under the heading of 'Historical causes' of uneven development. One teacher's interpretation of the paragraph was: 'Yes, they are basically saying that when they were part of the colonies, they were fine. After they gained independence, that's when their problems started . . . It's gobsmacking, isn't it?' (TE p.7–8) and a History teacher said: 'The historian in me is freaking out. This is awful'. TF p.9

Students and teachers commented on the limited teaching of colonialism in school, and several students gave very confused descriptions of their understanding of the topic. Some said they had learned about colonialism in Key Stage 3 History, but remembered little and others recalled learning about it briefly in geography lessons. One student replied to the question: do you remember studying colonialism:

> No. The thing is if we want those grey areas, we go around it, we don't really focus on it. Because it does create those questions of racism. And British people, they tend to not really focus on the controversial topics and that's evident in these questions because they're not focussing on the deeper problems. They always make Western countries, oh, they're so great, they're so amazing. SS p.11

Another noted the way the textbook tackled colonialism:

> I think a lot of the reason why maybe they [LICs] aren't as developed as us is probably our fault and I think it could definitely be argued that we've played quite a big role in the creation of the third world. But that's not something that's recognised at all in textbooks. Yes, individual teachers might touch on it and might address it, but I think it's probably something that's sort of hidden away from us. In geography it's not in the textbooks. It's mentioned, oh, this is part of the country's past, but look how they developed from it, rather than blaming us particularly. SM p.6-7.

The confused understanding of colonialism amongst several students and surprised reactions to the textbook paragraph by teachers raise a question: why is colonialism, which is so crucial to an understanding of global development, marginalised in the GCSE geography curriculum? Insufficient time and the complexity of the topic were offered as reasons by one teacher. But other reasons may be involved. Stuart Hall wrote in 1978:

> . . . the profound historical forgetfulness – what I want to call the loss of historical memory, a kind of historical amnesia, a decisive mental repression – which has overtaken the British people about race and Empire since the 1950s. Paradoxically, it seems to me, the native, homegrown variety of racism begins with this attempt to wipe out and efface every trace of the colonial and imperial past (p.26).

Whilst this textbook example does not fit exactly Hall's 'historical amnesia', it merits the label of 'selective remembering' through colour-blindness. Noticeable by its absence in the textbook is reference to colonialism's 'race'- based classification system which 'put people of darkest skin tones at the bottom of the human hierarchy and lightest at the top' (Leonardo 2009, p.41), a system deployed to justify and legitimise the colonial enterprise (Mahmud 1999, p.1222). Reference to the complicity of Geographers in this pseudo-science is absent too. The obfuscation of 'race' in the paragraph places 'race' out-of-sight, whilst leaving traces of an implicit racialisation based on white colonisers and Black colonised in the reader's mind. In the paragraph, responsibility for the 'dysfunctionality' of former colonies rests with the colonies, not with the colonisers, yet student M alludes, insightfully to the role of Europe in 'the creation of the third world' (Rodney 2018; Galeano 1997). The racialised discourse normalises white 'business-as-usual' by hiding Britain's history of genocide, dispossession, de-humanisation, whilst failing to indicate colonialism's legacy evident in contemporary global power relations.

Evidence of a profoundly offensive stereotype arose in one student's interpretation of the paragraph, reminiscent of the white framed image of indigenous and enslaved people of Africa and America as 'uncivilised' and 'savages' (Feagin 2013), constructed to serve imperial purposes by white Europeans:

> It all sounds very violent . . . and creates a very violent image of the people. And almost kind of savages, if you know what I mean. I don't know, that sounds awful . . . but it's the image that . . . All these people who are all fighting and buying guns[9] SQ p.15-17.

Such de-humanising discourses effected a justification for in-human treatment of colonised people by colonisers (Mills 2007, p.62). The influence of these racial micro-aggressions involves not only differential allocation of value based on racialisation (Pulido 2017), but, as Fanon describes it: 'the internalization – or, better, the epidermalization – of this inferiority' (Fanon 1967, p. 4).

The final recurring theme refers to that element of contemporary education policy in England associated with the competitive market and managerialism: performativity.

Teachers' and students' experiences of the regime centred on maximising students' examination grades according to prescribed curriculum knowledge. In this section I address the final research question: 4) how do teachers negotiate tensions between school and out-of-school narratives?

Performativity

Performativity, ' . . . a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation' (Ball 2003, p.216), has established new forms of control in education by challenging teachers' values and encouraging them to think of themselves in business terms as 'value-adding' individuals, responsible for improving their 'productivity' (measured by students' GCSE grades) within a high-stakes, competitive education system (Winter 2017). In England, policy reforms over the last 30 years have intensified the power of performativity in the teaching profession through increased Government control over curriculum knowledge and its assessment. This knowledge is premised on assumptions of objectivity and factuality, with little recognition of discursivity.

Discourses both propagate and constrain the circulation and assimilation of certain knowledge 'truths'. They operate by naturalising as undisputable some 'truths' which are linked to powerful ontologies, epistemologies, institutions and social structures, to constitute the materialities of everyday life. The topic of 'global development' in Geography GCSE is one such discursive construction, influenced by the history of the discipline and the knowledge production teams who re-constitute the subject for schools. The notion of GCSE Geographical knowledge as indisputable truth was picked up by both students and teachers. One teacher reported how, when the textbook representation of a phenomenon did not match students' experiences, students: ' . . . look in the textbook and go, well, if the textbook says it, it's got to be right' (TA). She described what she said to students:

> ' . . . I know that you know that this won't be correct, but just for GCSE, this is what I want you to learn'. And actually there are conflicts with students, because they'll go: ' . . . but I was brought up in this country, I know it doesn't quite work like that'. And I go: 'yes, but for the GCSE, just think of it this simple'. TA

Some students rationalised their partiality, one saying: 'Because I'm British, I live in England, I don't see it from these other countries perspective. So I just take it as it is' (SL, p.17). But several students questioned the authenticity of curricular representations of countries and people. Teacher D reported how a student declared to the class in a lesson focusing on problems in Pakistan: ' . . . you need to know, that's not what my Pakistan is like. If you ever go, you'll think it's beautiful', and another student with family links to an African country said:

> I've been to . . . and I know that everyone isn't just living in squatter settlements and actually there's culture and there's music and life and it's vibrant and it's not just . . . obviously there are a lot of poor people in poverty and stuff, but there is more to it than that. I think sometimes a lot of those people just become statistics in a way and actually the idea that these people all have lives and all have history and stuff is lost a bit, and that annoys me. I think they just need to remember that other people have a life and culture, other than their people in the West (SM, p.4).

Although students' critical insights are evident as they challenge white curriculum knowledge, conformity to the authority of school knowledge is required in order to achieve target grades. Students recognised the operation of the curriculum of deceit whereby teachers are torn between conforming to examination pressures and enacting their professional values. One said of the teacher:

> He said he doesn't want to teach this because he finds it wrong, but he has to because of the GCSE thingy . . . because it's [the critique of whiteness] not in the GCSE specification . . . so they can't teach it. I'm sure he'd love to, but he just wants to get us past our GCSEs. SE p.3.

A sensitive moment occurred during a lesson when a Black student drew attention to the representation of racialised difference in a cartoon sketch used for examination practice. The teacher deflected the student's comment, finding it 'awkward' to address, and offered the explanation to the student that his point was not relevant to the mark scheme. On another occasion, a teacher decided not to use Pakistan as an example of a case study of earthquakes in an LIC to avoid offending Pakistani students in the class. One student asked 'why aren't we doing about Pakistan? Pakistan has had an earthquake'. In order to avoid embarrassment, the teacher gave another reason.

All the teachers complained about pedagogical pressures. One described the system as an 'exam factory' (TE, p.11) in which students were encouraged to follow the 'one-mark -a-minute' rule to answering GCSE questions and how they felt compelled to 'push[ing] it [geographical knowledge] down their throats'. Describing himself as an 'exam-prepper' (TC p.16), another explained 'At the end of the day we've got to get the results for the students' (TD p.2), and another remarked on 'right-answerism', saying 'these are the answers, there is no other answer' (TA p.2–3). Teacher B, who, in the past taught 'the development gap' through student-centred research, stated that now: the 'inquiry approach is completely out the window – non-existent' (p.14). Teachers acknowledged these deceits as anti-educational. They remained however, constrained by the power of the regulatory regime into compliance, obstructed from adopting an anti-racist position and thereby further sustaining the white curriculum.

Conclusion

The study reveals the discourse of whiteness resonating within the global development topic in the Geography GCSE curriculum through the voices of participants. Returning to the research questions, question 1 asked 'what narratives of global development are found in school texts?' GCSE Global development texts promoted a 'us' and 'them'/ 'white' and 'black' narrative, sustained through negative stereotyping, comparison, simplification, datafication, notions of resilience and benevolence, misrepresentation of colonialism and Islamophobia. These discourses form the constituent elements of whiteness that generate and reproduce racist outcomes.

The second research questions is: 'what narratives of global development are held by students and teachers?' In order to meet the requirements of the high-stakes assessment system, teachers and students are coerced to engage with white Geographical narratives. Such compliance is necessary to achieving target grades which carry a high status in the social and economic order. Whilst the origin of Geography's white epistemologies lies in the subject's history, their continuation is maintained through the 'glue' of racialised neoliberal performativity. Third, 'how do school narratives learned by students relate to those learned out-of-school? Differences emerged between students' in- and out-of-school narratives, since students brought their own, their families' and their communities' geographical knowledges to the classroom. The final research question asks how do teachers negotiate tensions between those narratives? Teachers were embarrassed by contradictions between school and home-based narratives and adopted strategies to avoid, deflect and excuse them. They prioritised their 'professional responsibilities' by teaching the white knowledge of the GCSE, but in doing so, compromised their political and ethical values and experienced reduced levels of professional autonomy.

In this study, teachers' wakening of awareness to the white geography curriculum plus the powerful insights articulated by students offer hope for the future. Following the Black Lives Matter campaign new activist groups have emerged within the geography education community. For example, the Royal Geographical Society has established a Race, Culture and Equality Working Group https://www.rgs.org/geography/black-geographers/researchers-networks/ and a Black Geography Teachers' Group https://www.rgs.org/geography/black-geographers/education-teaching/ . 'Black Geographers' https://www.blackgeographers.com/blogs/news is a community interest company working to tackle the erasure of black people in geography and Reroot.ED https://twitter.com/Reroot_ED is a campaign run by young black students whose goal is to make the secondary school education system anti-racist, critical and inclusive. Other sources of inspiration and justice include Anti-Racist Geography Curriculum https://twitter.com/ARgeogcurric and Geo-ramblings https://geogramblings.com/. Members of the Decolonising Geography Collective https://decolonisegeography.com/work with examination boards and textbook publishers, produce a blog and to develop innovatory decolonised teaching materials .[10]

The task ahead is large – tweaking curriculum specifications and textbooks, introducing aspects of 'multicultural'/ 'diversity and inclusion' (D & I) education into the curriculum; adding Black researchers to reading lists and conducting D & I audits are starting points, but these overlook the subject's obstinate white epistemology and society's systemic racism. Decolonising the curriculum is riven with complex and sensitive issues which generate highly charged emotions (Kobayashi 1999; Tuck and Wayne Yang 2012) and the responsibility for change rests, not only with Black geographers, but with all geographers and all educators.

Notes

1. 'Awarding' gap replaces 'attainment' gap to explain how the 'gap' is not attributable to differential intellectual capacities of Black and white students, but to institutional practices and structural racism in society.
2. 'Black' and 'white' people are used to indicate people racialised as black or white.
3. GCSE is a two-year prescribed curriculum for 14–16 year-olds in England which ends with an externally assessed examination.
4. The term 'awarding' gap replaces 'attainment' gap to draw attention to the gap not being attributable to differential intellectual capacities of Black and white students, but to institutional practices and wider structural racism in society.
5. Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England.

6. At the start, I worked with a research assistant, but unfortunately, they were unable to continue to work on the project.
7. Student (S) P.
8. Metaphors of colours are multimodal techniques which graphically reinforce dominant representations, in this case ‘danger’.
9. Reporting such extreme views may be argued to involve ‘development pornography’ that perpetuates and reinforces unjust, negative, stereotypes. After careful consideration, however, I decided to include this comment to accurately reflect the students’ words.
10. The #VoicesProject: working with marginalised voices in schools decolonising geography group and oral history project designed to develop narrative plurality and equitable classrooms https://www.thevoicesproject.co.uk/

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