

DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM

There is a new wave of diversification – on screen and in the theatre (and elsewhere) – at the moment and the diverse films and plays and discourse have added richness and interest to the landscape.

Stories from outside the western mainstream are breaking records and gripping audiences. e.g. *Black Panther* (2018) and *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) with their diverse production teams, cast and storylines are certainly ‘decolonising’ the world of film.

Adding diversity adds interest for everyone - not just for the minorities. Black culture, Asian culture etc. now have successful ‘artefacts’ to represent them not just ‘an influence’ on subject matter or characters i.e. these cultures are not just represented by a character but are now actually ‘owning’ the product by owning the story, characters, and production process.

So there is a decolonising process underway and growing stronger as other cultures find their voices. But the one ‘culture’ which is often overlooked and which most urgently needs to take its place beside Black culture, Asian culture etc. is ‘White culture’ - also known in academia as White World and studied as Whiteness theory.

It is often ‘overlooked’ because of its ubiquity but an interrogation of White World as one of a panoply of cultural forms and styles, is a key part of the de-colonisation process. When it is not viewed in this way it is invisible despite being predominant and preponderant.

Studying cultural production through the ‘lens’ of White World is not objective and impartial and is thus flawed academically. This is stating the obvious to a Black film producer or an Asian screen writer or to a serious academic and yet in most cases it is the norm, and when a phenomena is normative, specific strategies are required to see it, to study it, to change it. It is everywhere – so it is not noticed - it is effectively invisible.

It has proven to be difficult to study because one finds it hard to see and hard to accept the depth of privilege one has been benefitting from (especially when one has always benefitted and thus never really noticed it) but even more so when confronted by the prospect of having to criticise and to ‘give up’ that privilege – once it has been identified and quantified.

Decolonising the curriculum is a fascinating challenge and there is a real will within society to see this done.

There are aspects of institutional racism that can be addressed. An indication of the sort of challenge involved can be seen in the term “Institutional Racism”. It is widely documented that this term was first defined by Lord Macpherson in the Macpherson Report in 1999 - an inquiry into the racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence and the subsequent police cover up. This is a classical White World fabrication. This term was used by black academic Folarin Shyllon in 1977 and by other black writers even before that!

The depth and influence of White World and its ability to control the narrative is evident in the way the origin of this key term has been wrongly attributed. In most other fields of academia such an error would have been quickly detected and eliminated. White academia may claim this was an unintentional error, but they usually do and few academics from other backgrounds have the means and the power to contest such assertions.

As a result of Critical Race Theory and other influences the presence of racism is now accepted and need no longer be re-proven in new studies about its impact. The study of this impact and the reactions to the findings of such studies has now spawned a whole new academic field of research and discourse. If history is a guide one may well speculate that even this ‘new space’ may potentially become colonised.

Well guess what?

It already has.

“Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”

proverb - via Chinua Achebe

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