

what do we mean when we speak about equality, diversity and inclusion in a university institution

Dr Nita Mishra

Dept of Food Business & Development

Cork University Business School



The structure

- What are the barriers encountered and key challenges that remain in terms of mainstreaming or embedding more equal, more inclusive and more diverse values into the university's mission in so far as you see them from your own perspective and in your own work?
- How do I deal with those and what works - what have I found that works in terms of bringing about change?

What are
the barriers &
key
challenges
encountered

• Invisibility

- Invisible whiteness
- Unintentional invisible/unconscious bias
- Unintentional/invisible charity approach
- Open racism
- Exotic-ness

Unintentional invisible/unconscious bias/invisible charity approach

- Examples– armed with a PhD I go for an interview: I really want to help you but my hands are tied:
- Do I need help? Does my work not speak for itself? Especially compared to those who get there before –always!! People of ‘no colour’
- In a one to one at a UCC ‘rewarding career journey’ I narrated, twice my experience of an informal interview where a high ranking ** govt official said- ‘we in the *** are not ready to have people of colour’; But the facilitator was not ready to listen to me, so how could one claim ‘to adapt, integrate and expand on existing expertise to prepare’ when one did not acknowledge one’s unintentional/invisible [whiteness]
- Student essay on colonialism in India

Invisible Whiteness

- Invisible white privilege confers dominance and power; it also conditions its practitioners into being comfortable, confident & oblivious to the way in which they are trained to inflict daily doses of hostility, violence and distress on non-white women. (Macintosh 1988)
- **The work of these feminists reveals that white race privilege makes a difference to their life chances, but they do not experience systemic racism as situated knowers (p.349)**

Whiteness

- Whiteness opens up and forecloses certain ways of reading the Indigenous Other because racial codes are always present in whatever we do and think. **They are one of the means by which the white naming of Indigenous anger makes it visible and negative, while white anger remains hidden behind words that are presented as benign and neutral. (ibid: 255)**
- Do we really require an indigenous embodied intellectual challenge to license their critique while simultaneously implying that one misunderstands white race privilege. And thus it is a common way racism works-- **when the Indigenous woman academic becomes the explanation for the existence of the white critic (p. 254).**

Uncomfortable? What we can do-

- On white privilege and male privilege Macintosh (1988) identifies 46 conditions of white race privilege which have been unearned. [For the scholar] silences and denials about unearned privilege protect systems of inequality and she asks herself what should she do with such knowledge?
- ... reflecting Difference and Whiteness Within Feminism on her white identity, [she] discusses aspects of her race privilege as she walks through her white neighbourhood. [she] concluded that rather than appropriate the other's experience of racism she needs to do work on her own racism and privilege.
- In Australia, [scholar] argues that feminist theory has been developed by those whose race privilege is derived from a network of relations of domination and there is a tendency in their work to blanket political practices and concerns. She suggests that women of privilege should work towards eradicating domination despite the uncomfortableness of this political and theoretical challenge. (p. 348-349)

What we can do—
Syed, Jawad & Ali, Faiza. 2011. **‘The
White Woman's
Burden: from colonial
"civilisation" to Third
World
"development"’,** *Third
World Quarterly* , 32(2): 349-365


... support postcolonial & transnational feminist approaches development which may provide a more comprehensive conceptual work capable of embracing a global politics of social justice in ways which are not inscribed by colonisation. This more holistic and realistic understanding of development would put all forms and colours of knowledge at the centre, producing other understandings based on contextual and empowering ideas emanating from indigenous cultures. **...these ideas are worthy of attention in order to develop an alternative theory of human development and to emancipate women, which also includes their emancipation from the white woman's burden** (p. 362)

The master's
tools will
never
dismantle the
master's
house (Lorde)

- We look to feminist methodologies! For answers. I do. All the time. But there too a lot of work needs to be done. And my work, your work, is the process of dismantling the masters' house!

Standpoint theories of feminisms

- **Dominant groups are especially poorly equipped to identify oppressive features of their own beliefs and practices,** as standpoint methodologies have argued (Harding 2004). **Their activities in daily life do not provide them with the intellectual and political resources necessary to detect such values and interests in their own work.** Value-free research is an unachievable ideal. For example, see the next slide--
- Research methods can detect values and interests that differ among observers, but **not those that such observers share.** Androcentrism, Eurocentrism, racism, heterosexism, and bourgeois values have generally been shared by research communities. Consequently, these cultural values and interests have **tended to persist unnoticed in the social sciences until pointed out by social justice activists.**
- And that is our role--



Invisibilities: Feminist Standpoint Theories

Feminist standpoint theorists' **social location, subjugated knowledges, strong objectivity and the socially situatedness of their knowledge are produced within post-colonising national contexts.**

Migrancy and dispossession indelibly mark configurations of belonging, home and place in the postcolonising nation-state.... enjoyed by the non-Indigenous subject—coloniser/migrant-...based on the dispossession of the original owners of the land... (Moreton-Robinson 2003)

There is an inextricable link between a nation state's sovereignty and what counts as knowledge, where and when it is produced and by whom. For example, all the universities in the USA and Canada, where feminist standpoint theorists produce knowledge, are built on Indigenous peoples lands. This racialised and gendered form of sovereignty, which I have argued elsewhere as being patriarchal and white, underpins and legitimises the existence of these universities and their everyday activities through its regulatory mechanisms of government and law. (Moreton-Robinson 2013: 335)

Can the subaltern speak?

The interrogation of systems of what [Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak](#) calls “**worlding**” (where a colonial or imperial narrative separates the colonized as “Third World,” fetishizes the “Third World” as exotic, and thus legitimizes colonial domination) is a primary concern of subaltern studies work, especially in how these systems of worlding appear in the historical archive and narrative. In this vein, rather than focusing on highly visible displays of political consciousness like documented riots or uprising, subaltern studies seeks to discover the discourses of dissent and resistance arising from everyday political action.

Since the subaltern cannot speak, does she need an advocate to speak for her, affirmative action or special regulatory protection. Spivak objects, “Who the hell wants to protect subalternity? Only extremely reactionary, dubious anthropologic museumizers. No activist wants to keep the subaltern in the space of difference ... You don’t give the subaltern voice. You work for the bloody subaltern, you work against subalternity” (ibid) (See [Museums and Colonial Exhibitions](#), [Myths of the Native](#)). She cites the work of the Subaltern Studies group as an example of how this critical work can be practiced, not to give the subaltern voice, but to clear the space to allow it to speak.



Equality, Diversity, Inclusion

- “...Just a reminder about the Race Equality Forum for staff members, scheduled for March [REDACTED] from 3-4 p.m. ([REDACTED]). This is open to all Black, Brown, minority racial and minority ethnic staff in [REDACTED] to attend and take part. Please indicate your interest [here](#) and a link to the meeting will be circulated next Thursday lunchtime” —an EDI invite

Diversity & Inclusion

- There are many definitions of EDI but I want to draw from my own experience
 - First of all inclusion must mean ‘not to exclude’, ‘not to make anyone feel excluded’ & ‘not to feel excluded’
 - Diversity means just that– diverse.
 - What I haven’t understood is why should it refer to only non-white Christians (in the Irish context)
 - Is white not a colour?
 - Colour-less?
- It is not easy. See Harrington--



Harrington, Louise. 2019.
“Postpartition Anxieties
and the Matter of
Authenticity in Ireland” in
*Partitions and Their Afterlives:
Violence, Memories, Living* edited by
Radhika Mohanram and Anindya
Raychaudhuri Rowman & Littlefield
International

- **Working with women writers from 25 countries and learning from their experiences of living and writing in Ireland, she discovers that these women were largely excluded from the literary spaces that the ‘native’ Irish enjoyed because, In this tangible elitism, the ‘stranger’ must struggle to find his or her place, both in society and in the colossus that is the Irish literary sphere...**

A reflection Co-create knowledge as equals

- We are in the process of engaging in the production of knowledge [about development], **and instead of 'collecting witness accounts about development' (Lazreg 2002: 127), we offer to be the subject as well as the object.** This is in itself a powerful tool, facilitated by CMW, which we argue could be used in DE to roll out the 'transformatory changes' it purports to.
- Borrowing from Freire's (1970) Pedagogy of the Oppressed, **we contend that to be transformatory, we must go beyond conventional models of pedagogy,** in favour of a more humanizing pedagogy that challenges the status quo between the learner and the teacher, and between the oppressed and oppressor.
- As co-producers of knowledge we have shown that the production of knowledge is a combination of serious reflection and action between equals, a horizontal dialogue guided by love, humility, faith and mutual trust.

Shifting the lens: **situating oneself** in critical pedagogy?

- 'As a white, middle aged, middle class, female academic I bring a level of privilege to this research that many involved with NGOs or affected by their communications do not share' (Dillon 2021) [*I would say, read Aileen Moreton*]
- 'Similarly, from those outside of the 'development circle', or those of African descent in Ireland, my imbrication in development and work in association with Dóchas, or my white Irishness, could be seen to present a barrier to radical transformation and decolonisation of GD communications within the sector ...**At the end of the day, readers decide whether the research is credible or not**' (ibid).

And YET I ask--61 participants?--- Were there any people of color? How many?

Invisibility-
situating
myself- my
'invisible
Brahmin(ess)'
critical
pedagogy

“Take the Brahmin women who come from India and they climb the ladder, they get the best education,” she said. “We give them every opportunity and they turn around and lead the charge on we’re racist, we’re an awful country, we need reform, our medical system needs reform. Well, here’s the problem. They’re taught that they are better than everybody else because they are Brahmin elites. And yet, on some level, their country is a shit hole, excuse my language.”

- **University of Pennsylvania law professor Amy Wax**

Invisible Brahminism should be interrogated:

- I was born a Brahmin; How many times have I been invisible to this fact which throws unseen privileges at my feet?
- But climb the ladder...shit hole??? This is the language of disrespect and racism

So what is the task to tackle 'Invisible whiteness'

- The task for feminism is to **establish a consciousness of the internal and external realities of whiteness** in order to rise to my challenge to theorise the relinquishment of power. Alison Ravenscroft (2001) focuses on subjectivity, identifying the white knowing subject who is invisible, unnamed and unmarked. For Ravenscroft **the unacknowledged presence of the white knowing subject is exposed in feminist practice and theory**, noting that in the United States the challenges to interrogate whiteness have been undertaken by white feminists...

What works, for me, in terms of bringing about change?

- **Materials:** strategies for incorporating relevant readings, images, videos for including alternative narratives, arguments, genealogies and perspectives
- -Activities/Assignments: ways of teaching; activities and assignments that we use for building intersectional awareness with students
- All of the above are linked and perhaps you will be able to glean from the way I present this

So what do I do?

- I use images of the white Irish on the streets of Dublin when discussing hunger or poverty; showcase Dublin Rape Crisis centre figures to discuss GBV, e.g.
- I write poetry; a well-meaning academic friend in 2010 remarked on my exoticness and ‘brains’; furiously I wrote my first (published) poetry which has been critically acclaimed as the future of Irish feminisms in 2016.

Embodying lived experience in poetry

- Vignettes, and our response(s) to them, can resonate with the reader producing embodied knowledge through textual encounters, facilitated by the poet/researcher's writing where she (me, in this case) positions herself within the vignettes/poems. This evocation of emotion is proof that “research [or poetry] encounters are always emotion-laden and imbued with power, reproducing and legitimating social hierarchy” (p.1).
 - Take for example, Tom's Exotic Princess

Poetry as a TOOL- Mainstreaming Tom's Exotic Princess

- I wrote in response to a comment by a friendly lecturer in 2010; maybe in 15 minutes sitting at a desk; someone asked to send in a poem to an anthology; I did;
- (read) The Poem
- Years later I found it cited alongside well known authors and poets –
- Claire Bracken writes-
- The lines of connection between race and gender, and the resultant emplacement of the body within this terrain, are also at play in a number of poems

The intense visibility that is incorporated into processes of racial othering is furthered in Nita Mishra poem 'Tom's Exotic Princess' in which the speaker explores her deeply uncomfortable and visible positioning as fetishised other, as 'Tom's exotic Indian princess'. Taking on the voices and reactions of people in Ireland to her race, she stages an intense interrogation...Looking at herself being looked at and read, the speaker weaves an incisive tapestry of sexist and racial prejudice

On the text—it is through her voice, humour, accent.... The brevity of words, of the poetic lines question the systems that contain their future..

Harrington implies my poetry has policy implications on EDI, on education: a changemaker?

Mishra offers an amusing but meaningful illustration of white Irish people's reactions to meeting an Indian. She refers to being seen as a 'brown woman', being judged or sized up immediately because of the colour of her skin as people try to figure out where she might be from, which only exposes their lack of knowledge...

Mishra further highlights the ignorance she meets in Ireland when she describes how people are surprised at her language ability....

The fact that people assume she is a tax-evading refugee who does not speak English...

Nita Mishra provides a valuable insight into the migrant experience through her poems, speaking openly about racist attitudes and prejudices against those who do not look or sound natively Irish and the everyday obstacles facing Ireland's nonwhite migrants, as well as white migrants perhaps.

Moreover, the poems draw attention to the implications of being an increasingly culturally and religiously diverse society where state policy and procedures need to catch up with the changing demographic landscape, for instance in the education system, which is deeply tied to the Catholic Church.

How do we understand EDI or decolonisation?

So, how do feminist indigenous decolonial scholars contribute to knowledge-making, cognisant of the processes that establish knowledge and practices of knowledge making as powerful in the academy? How do we deal with the tensions of indigeneity, feminism and coloniality in their relational forms? How do we maintain a position that is cognisant but de-linked from dominant frames of knowledge? How do we practice re-thinking from other worldviews, themselves not innocent of tensions? **How do we do this when our everyday lives are punctuated by the realities and impacts of unjust and racialized economic, political, cultural, environmental and social systems** (Yvonne Te Ruki-Rangi-o-Tangaroa Underhill-Sem 2020: 315)

So what will work?

So, what I have tried to do is uncover some invisibilities so that we can all---

- Interrogate ourselves: people of colour, and those of no-colour (white):
 - Wilhelm Steinitz, the first world Chess champion: “The players draw by lot for move and choice of color. In all international and public Chess matches and tournaments, however, it is the rule for the first player to have the white men (1889: xii, in *The Modern Chess Instructor*)
- Acknowledge our ‘invisible whiteness’ across all inequalities forced on us because of our intersectionalities- (colour, prejudices across class, caste, ethnicity, nationality, etc)
- Understand that I am not the other anymore, I can write my own story and announce it to the world in my own voice
- Solidarity is essential

References

- P. McIntosh, 'White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies' (1988) in Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins (eds), *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology*, 3rd edition (Wadsworth Publishing) Belmont, California, 1992, p. 101
- Militz Elisabeth, Faria, Caroline, and Carolin Schurr. 2019. "Affectual intensities: Writing with resonance as feminist methodology," *Area*. 1-8.
- Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2006) Whiteness Matters, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 21:50, 245-256
- Syed, Jawad & Ali, Faiza. 2011. 'The White Woman's Burden: from colonial "civilisation" to Third World "development"', *Third World Quarterly* , 32(2): 349-365
- <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/19/spivak-gayatri-chakravorty/>