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ANTI-RACISM FORUM

Event held within the Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering
09.07.2020



X



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Staff Responses

*"It was moving to hear about the implicit and explicit racism that students had experienced. **Hopefully we can engage in a meaningful and continuous dialogue that delivers actual change** in how we teach, learn and think about architecture."*

*"My main comment would be to **not scale down the ambition of change.**"*

*"**Colonialist thinking is pervasive throughout every aspect of design**, not only in the content of our courses, but how we conceive of the built environment and its creation. **It's all our responsibility to challenge this.** This should open up a wider debate about the traditional role of the architect and how new forms of practice might deliver social and environmental justice. This can only be done through **questioning assumptions and challenging the status quo** through encouraging a broad range of perspectives."*

"Elegantly curated, eloquently explained and poignantly delivered - a real credit to all."

*"I think the students were **rightly passionate about this subject** and put forward some excellent points. We are already hopefully thinking about these things very carefully and we are ourselves fully committed to being anti-racist, but it was very useful to have a condensed case being made covering a wide range of related points at once. **It was a useful event to help keep these values at the forefront of our minds** as we make changes in the department."*

*"I was very impressed by the how clearly the students articulated their concerns, the issues that need to be addressed and their desire to **engage constructively with the department to effect change.**"*

"I note that young people today are acutely aware of the challenges of social and economic inequality, institutional racism and the urgent need to respond to the ecological and climate emergencies – these problems are interrelated and that young people should be given the opportunity to shape how the profession responds to these."

*"**Admirable that these students are trying to make the world a better place.**"*

THE EVENT

Date: 09/07/2020.17:30

Duration: 2 Hours

Order of Events:

Kyale Mwendwa (DA Co-Chair)

Tanyaradzwa Chiganze
(DA Co-Chair)

Ruqia Osman
(SU Education Officer 2019-2020)

Zeid Hassan Truscott
(DA Member)

4th year students and DA members:

Ashni Dave,
Jasmine Lawrence,
Mohit Buch.

Kyale Mwendwa (DA Co-Chair)

An open and inclusive opportunity to discuss the topics raised by the speakers.

All attendees returned to the main forum and scribes summarised their breakout room discussions.

Who is Decolonise Architecture?

We are a collective of University of Bath students and alumni fighting for a new, holistic, transparent, and free format of education. We aim to collaborate with department staff to create an educational experience that is inclusive for all. We believe that this will give students the ability to design for the betterment of the global community. As an anti-imperialist student group, our primary aim is to eliminate institutional discrimination through the department's educational curriculum, admissions and practices. We believe in a future where the industry is gender and racially diverse and does not facilitate or perpetuate systemic racism by being truly ethical. We also aim to continuously collaborate with the department in the effort to effect curriculum changes. We are excited about this new era and anticipate great change.

What Are Our Aims?

In summary, we are working towards a future where:

Architectural education is inclusive and global. The department's student population reflects wider society in terms of ethnicity, and the attainment gap between white students and BAME students is closed. The department provides a network of support for BAME students who experience institutional and/or covert racism.

Further detail can be found on page 06.

WHAT DOES DECOLONISING ARCHITECTURE MEAN?

"With the latest Black Lives Matter protests fresh in our mind, conversations around race and racism have been brought to the fore. Within the School of Architecture these conversations have moved from conversations of hopelessness between students of colour and ally members of staff into a conversation that is calling on the whole student body and staff to fight racism. 'Decolonise Architecture' was set up by a number of students to tackle the institutional racism faced within the University of Bath and to educate and politicise students, staff and professionals across the industry as well.

But what does decolonising architecture look like and what does it mean? In its broadest sense 'Decolonisation is about recognising the roots of contemporary racism in the multiple material, political, social and cultural processes of colonialism and proceeding from that point; this involves the laborious work of structural change at several levels of society'.

It is about changing the lens through which we see society. This not only means questioning why our curriculum is the way it is, but also looking at the wider social, political and economic contexts of the works featured in the architectural canon. It also means looking at modules like History & Theory and seeing how they can be developed so we can better understand the society we design for and what the impacts of our architecture will be on that society. The impact can be positive and I hope our work will be, but it can also be negative with communities destroyed through gentrification and even death as seen in the Grenfell Tower disaster.

Decolonising architecture is not simply about diversifying reading lists - though important, this should not be the limit of progress. We need to look at the structural issues within our university and profession that perpetuate racial inequality - for example white students are 2.7 times more likely to be accepted onto the Architecture BSc than black students. While this is not down to direct discrimination on the part of department staff, given that applicant ethnicity is not disclosed at the point of application, the reasons must still be looked into. We must also investigate the institution-wide awarding gap between black and white students, with white students being awarded higher marks across the board.

These are all conversations that need to be had to change the culture within architecture, from one that is silent on racism to a profession that acknowledges the problem and aims to tackle it directly. This change will not happen overnight; there is a long road ahead but this is just the start."

Written by Zeid Truscott for Paperspace Magazine, Issue 14.

BATH'S STUDENT EXPERIENCES

First Year Overview

Speaker: Mohit Buch (Class of 2020)

As a student collective, we identified the need for changes of various degrees throughout all four years of the undergraduate course. The overriding theme is that there is a need for at least one actively socially conscious project in each year that goes beyond performative activism. In the first year, the pavilion brief on campus had the greatest potential to tackle issues such as student welfare and inclusivity. For example, a pavilion for international SU societies to host socials or an extension of the LGBTQ+ society. Students would have been able to respond to the multitude of issues and problems that face students at university as opposed to, in our case, just having to provide an exhibition space for the architecture department. In addition, an environmental project tackling the refugee crisis was relegated to a submission with no marks and an optional presentation. Such topics would benefit more from in depth lectures on the refugee crisis and surrounding culture along with thoroughly analysed feedback.

Second Year Overview

Speaker: Mohit Buch (Class of 2020)

In second year, the project briefs could have benefited from picking at least one site outside of Bath. The students agreed that teaching how to design for strict contexts such as Bath is beneficial, however, the projects could work towards offering sites, such as Bristol, that are more representative of the diverse demographic across the rest of the nation. When designing for Bath, some students felt that their proposals were met with feedback that focused more on what could not be done as opposed to how the city can be designed for. Efforts have been made by staff to encourage schemes in underprivileged areas of Bath, hence this is an effort that will require commitment on both sides.

Third Year Overview

Speaker: Jasmine Lawrence (Class of 2020)

The first group project area was set in Tower Hamlets in London, an underprivileged ward with a diverse and high immigrant population. The unique demographic was often acknowledged, but these facts rarely made it past the scene setting pages of design reports which was not picked up by staff nor students. Students felt that there could be more information on how to design for such deprived environments and some even commented that they felt their projects were contributing to the gentrification of the ward. In the year below, students said they received very little support on how they could address issues such as Bristol's involvement in the slave trade for the same project. Education on gentrification would have helped to better inform projects to respond to Poplar's social needs rather than a focus on the 'barge community' of the canals which led to an idealised view of a middle class audience.

Fourth Year Overview

Speaker: Jasmine Lawrence (Class of 2020)

In fourth year, the history and theory module was criticised for a distinct lack of diversity. The module could benefit from speakers with more balanced gender representation and greater ethnic diversity. This currently reflects the minimal reference to high calibre architects outside the Western bubble within the last four years. The history and theory lectures often act as a precursor to the formulation of the individual brief. As a result, there could have been lectures given about Bristol's homelessness, an in-depth history of its involvement in the slave trade and the socio-economic struggles of different areas of the city, also giving context to the suggestions provided when helping students to choose a site. These lectures could better encourage and prepare the number of students wanting to address social issues in their final projects.

BREAKOUT ROOM DISCUSSIONS

Discussion Prompts:

- What was the most impactful point made by the speakers?
- Was there anything you learned or were surprised to hear during the talks?
- What should be done to address systemic racism within our department?
- Based on the topics raised, what area of systemic racism within architecture do you feel a need to further your knowledge of and why?

This was an open and inclusive opportunity for people to discuss the topics raised by the speakers. The smaller groups enabled participants to hear the perspectives of others and allow a broad range of questions to be answered. Interactive breakout rooms allowed both staff and students to address the prevalence of systemic racism and hear others' perspectives.

Breakout Room #1

Scribe: Mohit Buch

Discussions clarifying what a micro-aggression is i.e. asking students of their origin, whilst taking up crit time.

Discussion focused around proper crit conduct as well as the different situations POC students would have to face vs White students.

Feasibility of implementing 'live' projects into the curriculum to increase student community engagement.

Breakout Room #2

Scribe: Kyale Mwendwa

Online learning offers greater opportunity to invite guest lectures from diverse backgrounds.

"Our current design processes are born out of colonial past, how far can we take this, is there more change"

There needs to be an increase in discussion and follow up between staff and students, the current structure allows for issues to be allocated to others and then forgotten.

Continued engagement is essential.

Breakout Room #3

Scribe: Tanyaradzwa Chiganze

Unconscious bias and the need to open up the dialogue and avoid passive embarrassment.

Acknowledged the need for the SSLC to also address these issues as the overarching student voice. Potential for more detailed meetings.

How does Bath relate to the wider world? The curriculum is structured so that students are hindered from learning about the wider context of global architecture.

Need more of a round-table approach in tutorials.

Can staff lobby higher powers (RIBA and ARB) alone? Currently, there's inertia and introspection/critical assessment of the course is needed.

What do YOU bring to the project design that is anti-racist?

BREAKOUT ROOM DISCUSSIONS

Breakout Room #4

Scribe: Ashni Dave

- » Interesting for first years to see the retrospective provided by fourth years.
- » Projects with more social outlooks can benefit the many who chose architecture with a desire to make a difference.
- » Proposal to look into the hiring process and how the critics are examined and trained.
- » Acknowledges the reality that the curriculum reforms have many elements that need to be addressed and understood by DA.
- » Forum is the most successful method of ensuring that voices are heard.
- » Concerns over and desire to fix what can be an unwelcome environment.
- » Staff acknowledging the need for retrospective self evaluation of outdated teaching methods.
- » Evaluation of the benefits/ drawbacks of linking H&T and studio projects.
- » 3rd year has no DEUs so can be ideal point to introduce change. PML and other modules such as environmental design can also be examined.

Breakout Room #5

Scribe: Jasmine Lawrence

- » Studio environment more difficult for people of colour due to lack of representation within faculty.
- » How English society being inherently racist leads to its built environment feeding into systemic racism.
- » Social impact of architecture should be considered along with the material and spatial qualities.
- » More education needed to tackle micro-aggressions against individuals.
- » Clearly advertising the Report and Support Tool.
- » The function of the second year projects were enjoyed (i.e. medical centre), but community context definitely needs more focus.
- » Staff gratitude towards the discussion of how projects in each year group could be improved.
- » Staff agreed there should definitely not be two projects situated within Bath in the same year.
- » Marking should be done blind to prevent subconscious bias.

Breakout Room #6

Scribes: Zeid Truscott and Ruqia Osman.

- » Willingness from staff to engage and be on the same page as students.
- » Plans need to be made to engage the wider student body outside of DA as well.
- » The department needs to be clear on its stance and actions in working with DA .
- » The department needs to be incorporating anti-racism and decolonising work at the core of curriculum transformation.
- » Bath's utopian style has been criticised within AJ before and is definitely something that has been recognised and needs to be worked on over the years.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Here are the key objectives that are directing our current and future actions:

1. Social Issues.

Introduce lectures discussing architectural responses to social issues to support Design Studio, particularly in 3rd year to better prepare the many students who choose socially conscious projects for 4th year.

2. World Architecture.

Develop a new History & Theory module for the non-DEU 3rd year unit to explore global architecture, including the impacts of colonialism and globalisation on the architectural canon.

3. Wider Curriculum.

Work with students through the Decolonise Architecture collective to lobby the ARB / RIBA to make world architecture an essential part of the curriculum.

4. Diversity.

Work with groups such as Black Females in Architecture to hire a more diverse body of visiting critics, tutors and guest lecturers. At the university level work with students to review recruitment policy and procedure for all staff.

5. Resources.

Support the library in increasing resources on global architecture and BAME architects and include such material on the weekly library email. Publish student essays through the library to create an accessible resource.

6. Students.

Work with charities such as the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust to encourage and support disadvantaged BAME students to study architecture and apply to the University of Bath.

7. Environment.

Mandatory diversity workshops for permanent and visiting staff to tackle subconscious bias and prejudiced comments which make students feel alienated or unwelcome. Expect staff to recognise and challenge inappropriate behaviour from their colleagues.

8. Reviews.

Introduce an anonymous post-review feedback system where students feel safe to raise concerns about inappropriate conduct or comments from critics, expanding on the current efforts to make reviews less confrontational.

9. Bath Presentation.

Ensure architecture is respectfully and accurately presented in the historical and political context that allowed it to be built such as war, colonialism and slavery.