Who Has the Capital on Knowledge Production? Reflections on the 'Sharp White Background' of Academia and Anti-racist Scholarship

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Abstract

What exactly do we mean by 'academic'? Often academic institutions are considered the key sites for knowledge production and exchange on the realities of human and social life. There is a claim that academic institutions exist as an 'ivory tower' divorced from the real world. However, this does not hold up. Academic institutions across the Global North hold considerable power in society. They privilege dominant worldviews and sustain inequality in society. Equally, the 'sharp white background' of academia – whereby White, middle-class, and male scholars hold a prominent position of social and cultural capital in academic institutions – results in patterns of whiteness in the academia. Amidst this, there is an important question at hand: who has the capital of knowledge production? By drawing on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, I explore and reflect on how academic modes of knowledge production reinforce whiteness and racism within and beyond the university. Confronted with the challenges of normative whiteness in academic modes of knowledge production, this article questions whether it is possible to go beyond the "master's tools" and conduct meaningful, anti-racist scholarship as racialised academics.
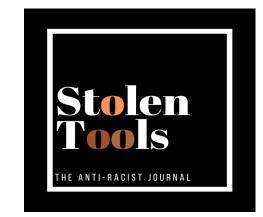
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Who Has the Capital on Knowledge Production? Reflections on the 'Sharp White Background' of Academia and Anti-racist Scholarship

What exactly do we mean by 'academic'? Academic institutions are perceived as the key intellectual sites for knowledge production, and essential to understanding the many facets of human and social situations. The knowledge produced in academic research can be served as an evidential basis for public or foreign policy matters to solve or limit fundamental challenges in society. For instance, knowledge transfer plays a key role in the social sciences, particularly when attempting to understand and resolve global challenges and policy discourse, from security and migration to climate change and pandemics. Although academic research is viewed as rigorous and credible, deserving of recognition for its major (and often deemed positive) impact on society, it is also obscure and inaccessible to the wider public.

On the contrary, it can be argued that academia holds considerable power in influencing social, political, and economic change in the real world. Throughout history, academic institutions occupied a prominent position of power in society by capitalising as the primary intellectual site where knowledge production takes place. At least in the Global North, many academic institutions are governed by the elite class, reflecting the number of wealthy vice-chancellors and the neoliberal transformation of the higher education sector (Maisuria & Cole, 2017). The power that academia has on the real world is visible through the top-down process of research and scholarship that influences policy and political debate, but also sustains inequalities by decentring the viewpoints that matter and affect us all. It shows us whose worldview is valued.

White Silence=Violence' by Domo, Unsplashed Ltd, 2021
A protest sign being held up by people in New York stating White Silence=Violence

The claim that academia is an 'ivory tower' is often misleading. Academic institutions are not separate from the real world – rather, the opposite. It is important to understand how this perspective privileges academic institutions to hold a monopoly on knowledge production, especially as it furthers unequal divides in society today. There is a need to crucially examine how academic modes of knowledge production sustain epistemic patterns of whiteness that continuously elude issues of race, racism, and legacies of coloniality. It also underlies a central question as to how academic institutions maintain their power in society: what, or rather, who holds the capital of knowledge production today?

The main connection between cultural capital and education is the social reproduction of inequality, in which cultural and materialist features of social classes are acknowledged or even rewarded within the wider education system. The concept of cultural capital, initially introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), recognises that culture is a constitutive and integral component of social identity. Cultural capital can sustain a system of hierarchy between social classes, as more affluent and privileged groups of people acquire knowledge, language, prestige,

, and – most importantly – proximity to power through their networks. Understanding who has a monopoly on knowledge production entails discussing the epistemological practices of curating and transferring knowledge but emphasising the link between power and knowledge. Reflexive sociology thus provides an illustration as to how the current academe[1],[2] occupies a position of power in society through a top-down approach to research and scholarship, from theory to influence on policymaking.

In this article, I offer both a reflection and critique on the monopoly of knowledge production in academia. Since starting my academic journey as a PhD student, I am growingly conscious that I am an outsider within my institution and field of study. Not simply because of my racial and class identity, but how that identity has informed my intellectual thought and worldview. My worldview involves going against normative whiteness (Ahmed, 2007) and critiquing our current lines of enquiry in academia when it comes to understanding contemporary issues in society. While my worldview may be inherently west-centric because of my British upbringing, it also enables me to have a more critical viewpoint on the Western imagination that dominates our current knowledge supplies. For this reason, I question the status quo of how knowledge is produced in these institutions, while also being confronted with a paradox of my own: how can I ensure my academic research can be meaningful and anti-racist while simultaneously challenging epistemic patterns of whiteness in knowledge production?

This article sets out to critique and explore our current modes of knowledge production in academia through the theoretical framing of cultural capital. In the first section, I question how academic institutions in the West monopolise knowledge production through the reflexive sociology of the academe (Kenway & McLeod, 2004; Wacquant, 1989). I engage with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital but also with analytical insights from postcolonial and critical race theories. In the second section, I bring this reflexive concept of cultural capital into practice to interrogate how the academic modes of knowledge production hold a west-centric imagination of the world, and the impact it has in society through the policymaking sphere. In the last section of this article, I question how we can challenge the current monopoly on knowledge production through anti-racist scholarship, and whether this is possible in the confines of the academe.

As a Black Muslim and British early career academic from a working-class background, my current concerns are not whether I fit in the current landscape of these academic institutions and why I lack the cultural capital that my White and middle-class counterparts easily possess. Rather, in recognising the White backdrop of the academe and how it dominates knowledge production, how can I engage with scholarship meaningfully in a way that can enact transformative political and social change?

Reflexive Sociology of the 'Sharp White Background'

"I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" (Hurston, 2000[1928]: 96)

The quote above from Zora Neale Hurston's (2000[1928]) essay, How it Feels to be Colored Me, is one that many racialised individuals can relate to as we navigate and work in academic spaces that do not intend to include us. I originally came across Hurston's essay after reading the powerful commentary by Azeezat Johnson (2019) on the challenges of conducting research

as racialised individuals within the White, normative confines of academic institutions. In academic research, racialised individuals and groups are often perceived as the (often researched) Other, while the White (researcher) Self is considered more knowledgeable and superior. Given the 'sharp white background' of academic institutions, Johnson (2019) debated whether it was possible to move beyond this binary of the researcher Self and researched Other as racialised academics and challenge normative whiteness in our scholarship. This points to the problematic nature in which academic institutions take over as the primary domain of knowledge, and how they platform certain worldviews over others. While the absence of Black and racialised academics is rather conspicuous, it also presents an unsurprising reality about the sharp white background in academia. Though there have been attempts to explain this absence through data reporting around social mobility and ethnicity in academic institutions. For example, the most commonly discussed issue of the academic "broken pipeline"[1] is the stark awarding gaps for first-class degrees between Black and White students (Arday, 2021; Williams et al., 2019). Further up the academic ladder, academics are also confronted with unequal pay and are more likely to hold precarious academic positions as a result of their race, gender, and disability status (UCU, 2021). However, the data reporting of social mobility should be taken with a grain of salt – it cannot accurately reflect how racism and other types of injustice are perpetuated within the institution. Rather, I purposely argue here that the institution was never designed for the success of racialised students and staff but to actively exclude our presence – including our ways of understanding the world, our struggles, and how we resist oppression through teaching and research.

As knowledge becomes monopolised by White, upper, and/or middle-class groups as a means of reproducing capital within their elite networks, it becomes a key social currency in a world where whiteness is rewarded and sustained (Richards et al., 2023; Wallace, 2018). The social and cultural capital of academic institutions in the Global North has historically embedded itself as the primary domain of knowledge production, as well as contributing to racial violence through the normalising of whiteness within and outside the university (Ahmed, 2007).

The university as an intellectual space remains ubiquitous in furthering race and class divide. It is instrumental in upholding divisions in societal structures by honing the future class of elites through prestige and capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), those with cultural and social capital are rewarded through their social positioning, but that arguably depends on their proximity to whiteness. Bourdieu (1986) outlines this concept of cultural capital through symbolic characteristics that White men and middle-class academics share collectively, which are often similar in language, intellectualism, cadence, and credentials (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Naidoo, 2004). Cultural capital becomes rewarded through journal publications, prestigious grants, fellowships, and an accelerated trajectory in academics' careers (Gopaul, 2015). For the rest of us who did not grow up with that capital, mainly if we do not fit the White, middle-class backdrop of the academe, we navigate much harsher politics of belonging in these institutions (Mirza, 2006; Shilliam, 2018). Consequently, it becomes near impossible for marginalised students and academics to conduct any meaningful change through research or scholarship.

Since starting my PhD, I no longer question why racialised academics exist in low numbers across academic institutions in the Global North (that is a makeshift issue for diversity and inclusion committees to address in their own time). Instead, I question and hope to unveil how whiteness in academia is responsible for furthering division in society. Is it enough for academic institutions

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2 Reflexive sociology, according to Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992), emphasised the position and disposition of the researcher. Position refers to the positioning of the researcher in their intellectual field. In contrast, disposition refers to the natural tendency to take on a specific position, often as a mark of their background in terms of culture, education, and capital. Bourdieu often challenged the authority of 'objectivity' in his work and whether objective scholarship was truly objective, or if it mirrored a more dominant perspective.

3 Academe refers to the academic environment or community. While academia can extend to academic research that may be formally conducted outside universities (e.g., research institutions), academe specifically refers to the culture of the academic community within universities.

4 The term "broken pipeline" refers to the academic pipeline for Black students from African and Caribbean backgrounds, from undergraduate studies to academic careers, where they experience unequal outcomes in degree awarding and low rates of retention. The report by Leading Routes entitled The Broken Pipeline specifically highlights the challenges Black students face in accessing UK research council funded PhD positions in British universities because of the disproportionate academic pipeline (see Wallace et al., 2018).

to make space for more of us to challenge normative whiteness, and somehow make a positive impact on marginalised communities through modes of knowledge production rooted in imperial theft and coloniality (Smith, 2021)?

To understand how worldviews are platformed or marginalised, I start by unpacking how academic institutions take over as the main domain of knowledge production. At least in the Global North, academic institutions have been long dubbed as an 'ivory tower' for a reason (Gabriel & Tate, 2017). As a collective of academics, institutions and publicly funded research bodies, academia is perceived as an intellectual site that is supposedly cut off from the real world (Barry, Chandler & Clark, 2001). It is important to emphasise how academics take hold of this knowledge production – when academics produce any research, it becomes rigorously examined by other academics through the peer review process, which again only centres their viewpoints as this knowledge becomes established and reified for intellectual consumption by other academics. However, in the social sciences and humanities, the knowledge produced rarely considers lived experiences or viewpoints from those directly affected by what is being researched or studied. This applies to the dominant principle of 'objectivity': the belief that knowledge should be scientific in nature, and based on reason and facts.

A central element of Bourdieu's work focused on the intersection of cultural capital with academic lines of enquiry, particularly of objectivism and subjectivism, and to whose standard that was viewed and practised. Focusing on those embodied dispositions of academics involved in curating knowledge, Bourdieu (1990) sought to understand how reflexivity may produce a more accurate understanding of the social world (Kenway & McLeod, 2004; King, 2000). However, I question whether the concept of cultural capital is passively inherited through social groups, or if it symbolises how groups can actively consolidate power. Instead, cultural capital can help us understand how European forms of knowledge became a vehicle of imperial conquest, eventually establishing Europe as the centre of knowledge.

In the historical context of knowledge transfer and the British Empire, scholarly networks were developed through universities to share information and ideas about the colonies with the metropole and further White and European settlement (Pietsch, 2010; 2015). When universities first emerged as institutions of colonial empires, the relationship between power and knowledge was paramount to understanding how academia became the primary domain of knowledge production. Scholarly networks aided in establishing academic careers. Professors in settler institutions were essential in assisting their students, who were predominantly White, male and English-speaking, in gaining admission to British universities. All the while scholarly networks were built on the theft of indigenous ideas and knowledge, while colonised groups were purposely excluded from these networks (Anderson, 2002).

When the entire enterprise of academic institutions is premised on European modernity – namely that any line of enquiry should be objective, rational and purely based on the facts, according to the standards of White, middle-to-upper-class men – peer review becomes a continuation of that 'white empiricist'[1] worldview (Prescod-Weinstein, 2019). All the while, viewpoints

of knowledge that centre discussions of race, gender, religion, or sexuality are constantly disputed and marginalised in the academe. For instance, academic freedom is continuously defended, though the privilege of academic freedom mainly falls on those in close proximity to whiteness (Sultana, 2018). The recent discourse on academic freedom focuses on the perceived threat of 'cancel culture', as movements to decolonise the university supposedly limit the freedom for academics to express opinions and ideas. However, both the 'Rhodes Must Fall' and 'Why Is My Curriculum White?' movements have shown us how universities, schools, and politicians have cracked down on student activism to censor our narratives of racial violence and colonial history (Shain et al., 2021). In the current political environment of the War on Terror in Britain, there is increased racialised surveillance by the state's security apparatus, namely Prevent, which actively censors and suppresses political dissent by Black and Brown students on campus (Kundnani, 2014; Qurashi, 2018). The very concept of academic freedom is only granted to those who maintain the status quo of the (White and rich) academe. Thus, academic freedom privileges modes of knowledge production that centre whiteness as the dominant worldview.

Through the reflexive sociology of the academe, we can begin to understand how academic institutions hold a prominent position of power in society. For instance, the concept of cultural capital can explain the disproportionate divide between academics and scholars along racial, gender, and class lines. It is easier for those in closer proximity to whiteness to be accepted and socialised into the academe, while those of us further away are more likely to fall short of the 'Ivory Tower'. Despite Bourdieu's lack of explicit engagement with race, colonialism and empire in the production of knowledge, there are some key takeaways from his general thesis on the reflexive sociology of the academe. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), reflexivity should go beyond the self-introspection of the researcher and how their view influences data collection and construction of their new knowledge, to include more intellectual dispositions (of the researcher's background, life histories and socialisation). We should examine how worldviews are maintained structurally, which worldview appears more natural and credible than others, and how adopting a west-centric perspective misrepresents how the world works or even leads to epistemic injustices.

The erasure of voices and lived experiences of racialised individuals is not accidental but by design. The 'sharp white background' of the academe is largely responsible for the epistemic patterns of racial and colonial violence, as well as normative whiteness. In the following section, I will examine how academic methods of knowledge creation tend to reward whiteness, evidenced by the reality of Western-centric discourse and narrative in the academic field of global health.

Confronting Western-centric[6] Scholarship

European colonizers have defined legitimate knowledge as Western knowledge, essentially European colonizers' ways of knowing, often taken as objective and universal knowledge. Arriving with the colonizers and influenced by Western ethnocentrism, Western knowledge imposed a monolithic world view that gave power and control in the hands of Europeans. It delegitimized other ways of knowing as savage, superstitious, and primitive (Akena, 2012: 600).

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5   According to Chanda Prescod-Weinstein (2019: 421), white empiricism refers to the "phenomenon through which only White people (particularly White men) are read has having the fundamental capacity for objectivity and Black people (particularly Black women) are produced as an ontological other". Though Prescod-Weinstein refers this phenomenon within the disciplinary context of physics, the challenge of white empiricism sustains itself even to the social sciences and humanities.

6   West-centrism (also known as eurocentrism) emerges as a common critique of European modernism, in which Europe is usually said to be the centre of world knowledge and intellectual thought. When it comes to understanding and justifying norms of society, culture, places, and history, west-centrism spotlights European and North American ideals as the gold standard. For further insight and critiques on Euro/West-centrism, see Bhambra (2014) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013).

Recognising the centrality of race in the making of world politics, W. E. B. Du Bois (1972[1903]: 23) famously recognised that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea". The colour line has a way of defining itself through the epistemic patterns of whiteness and west-centrism widely across the social sciences, as it foregrounds itself in the racial contrast and divide between the supposed ideals of the (White) West and the failures of the (racialised) non-West. The epistemological privileging of the West in the social sciences tends to focus on the social, economic, and political structures of Europe and North America, disregarding the complex racialised, gendered, and class processes that underlie global hierarchies. The neglect of colonial histories is not an accidental oversight, but rather a common epistemic pattern of whiteness to 'provincialize Europe' (see Chakrabarty, 2000) and the wider West as the standard-bearers of our "global society" (Go, 2013; Bhambra, 2014). In other words, the West or Global North takes centre stage as the primary driver of modernity and civilisation, while the Global South is further relegated as the polarising opposite of their civilising objectives (Barkawi & Laffey, 2006; Sabaratnam, 2020).

Understanding how academic modes of knowledge production sustain institutional racism and coloniality through a top-down approach is important. Cultural capital allows a dominant perspective to take hold of the monopoly on knowledge production by (re)producing narratives favourable to whiteness and maintaining the status quo from academic theory to policymaking spaces. Turning now to the field of global health, it is important to demonstrate here how west-centric narratives reflect the epistemic patterns of whiteness as it centres the West as the focal point of modernity.

Despite the recent efforts to 'decolonise' the field (Büyüm et al., 2020; Hommes et al., 2021), the academic debates in the global health field remain uncritical of the epistemic patterns of whiteness and west-centrism. The lack of criticality in global health often mirrors the dominance of scholarship situated in the Global North, especially as it centres on the English language, and Western ideas, theories and values (Anderson, 2014; Affun-Adegbulu & Adegbulu, 2020). In close connection to the ideas and values of Enlightenment thinkers, public health began as a colonial endeavour in which racialisation was consolidated and normalised. The concept of health became securitised to protect the colonial officers, administrators and military in their imperial conquest through the theft of indigenous practices of healing and care, while framing the colonies and indigenous people as threats to Western civilisation (Schiebinger, 2017). Despite the shift from colonial medicine, that problematic narrative of the former colonies as a threat to Western civilisation still stands in the contemporary scope of global health (Bashford, 2000; Howell, 2014).

The pandemic politics of COVID-19 best illustrate how this power is wielded through knowledge production. As academics try to rationalise the COVID-19 response through the Western political lens, the field has inevitably failed to truly grasp how the pandemic became a racialised, gendered, and overall unequal phenomenon. The lack of critical engagement with state policies on COVID-19 allowed moral panics and populist sentiments to flourish about vaccines, migration and lockdown measures, resulting in strict border measures and increased policing of racialised and migrant communities by Western countries (Gregory, 2021; Mendelson et al., 2021). The actions and discourse surrounding the travel bans during the pandemic, to a larger extent, represent a continuation of colonial fear and racist narratives about the Global South as a threat to European civilisation.

Likewise, the wider global majority have been stigmatised for their supposedly 'poor health-seeking behaviour' in the process, as they grapple with real concerns about their livelihoods and any mental toll during lockdown. The academic discourse of vaccine hesitancy also paternalised and ignored concerns from racialised communities. Most scepticism toward vaccines came from real concerns about the hidden histories of scientific and medical racism regarding experimentation, control of bodies, and false biological claims about race and pain (Schiebinger, 2017; Washington, 2006). Yet, there is an disconnect between the critical understanding of contemporary challenges and our collective lived experiences of generational trauma and racism. Hence, the contemporary understanding of vaccine hesitancy remains divorced from the historical legacies of medical racism. The normalising of west-centrism in academic global health has a knock-on effect on policy and political change at the top, which does the opposite of protecting all people, even the most marginalised, from threats to our health and well-being.

Both west-centrism and whiteness in academic modes of knowledge production have sustained, if not created, harmful racial constructs of the global majority as threats to migration, security, and health. Consequently, reflexive sociology becomes crucial to understanding how this current domain of scholarship adopts a normative standpoint that platforms the White, Western view as the universal in the academic modes of knowledge production, and why it is necessary to question the concept of objectivity when it reinforces the Western authority of knowledge and ideas. In the renowned essay '*Can the Subaltern Speak?*', Gayatri Spivak (1988) stresses the significance of critically assessing how the Western intellectual viewpoint has come to be the voice of authority while the Other has been systematically silenced. In essence, the west-centric view becomes symbolic of that 'sharp white background' of the academe. By understanding how mainstream modes of knowledge production in academia heavily emphasise white and Western forms of superiority, we need to challenge the epistemic homogeneity that sees the diverse and unique social, political, and cultural structures across the world as one.

As racialised students, academics, and even scholar-activists within our own merit, there is a need to consider whether the current modes of knowledge production can support any critical insights that challenge normative assumptions resulting from White and Western imaginations of the world. Knowledge is neither passive nor an artefact of information that should be accepted at face value. As illustrated earlier in this article, reflexive sociology of the academe can allow us to examine how knowledge is produced in tandem with power, in terms of recognising which forms of knowledge are recognised and credible, and which ones are not worth paying attention towards. To this end, we can begin to question how and whether it is possible to invoke anti-racist scholarship that challenges these epistemic patterns of whiteness.

Becoming Anti-racist Scholar-activists

"If we are going to bring social change [within these academic institutions], we need to understand their historical foundations in racist systems and contemporary perpetuation of racial violence. Instead of repurposing some of the master's tools, we must speak up and begin the task of dismantling the master's house." (Joseph-Salisbury, 2018: 47)

Drawing on the wisdom of Audre Lorde (2019[1984]), the university becomes symbolic of the 'master's house', and our current modes of knowledge production as the 'master's tools'. It is important to assert here that my reflections do not offer solutions to overcoming west-centrism and normative whiteness in knowledge production. As I pay a great deal of attention to racial and colonial discourses in the social sciences, I also take stock of my own perspective and the socio-cultural attributes tied with my British identity. Throughout my educational and now research journey, I have undergone a transformative process of learning and unlearning, and try to engage with voices and histories that are otherwise excluded from the mainstream literature. However, as I reflect on the 'sharp white background' of academia, I am also confronted with a catch-22. By participating in the academic modes of knowledge production, will my work only further epistemic patterns of whiteness and racial violence? How, then, can I challenge normative whiteness and ensure that my own work is

Returning to Bourdieu's analysis of objectivism and the reflexive sociology of the academe, research can never truly be impartial in an unequal society. As anti-racist academics, our sense of duty varies from most of our colleagues when it comes to ethics, care, and philosophies of knowledge in research. Though I often contemplate how I can do things differently with my own scholarship, I question whether it is possible to engage with anti-racist methodologies in a violent system that normalises the opposite of what we want to see in the world. In today's context of knowledge production, there is a struggle to carry out radical and intellectual work while adhering to the strict standards of objectivity, peer review, and ethics. In particular, the embedding of racial hierarchy within and beyond the confines of the university, and the assumption that the White, Western view is the universal truth. How can this be overcome?

It is important to note that anti-racist scholarship is not a recent phenomenon, nor limited to academics – activists have long relied on theory and knowledge to not only comprehend our everyday realities of racism but also as a form of political resistance. Ambalavaner Sivanandan, an anti-racist scholar-activist, left a profound legacy through his transformative work with the Institute of Race Relations (IRR). During the early 1960s, Sivanandan started as a librarian with the IRR, initially a think tank organisation on race relations between Britain and the Commonwealth. After six years as a chief librarian, Sivanandan and his colleagues transformed the institute into a radical space for Black Power and anti-colonial liberation, giving a voice to the subaltern and powerless through writing and scholarship (Shilliam, 2018; Sivanandan, 2008). It was also the birthplace of the distinguished anti-imperial journal, *Race & Class*, showcasing scholarship on 'Black and Third World Liberation'. Although Sivanandan was not an academic but a scholar-activist who took over as the director of the Institute of Race Relations, his scholarship transformed many of our understandings of capitalism, globalisation, imperialism and the racialised and political dimensions of class struggle (Choudry, 2020).

In the United States, the critical scholarship Patricia Hill Collins also serves as a shining example of scholar activism as she often speaks truth to power in the context of knowledge production and intersecting forms of oppression by race, gender, class and sexuality. Collins (2012: 291) asserts the importance of resisting harmful politics of knowledge production through black feminist thought, as it "fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about unjust power relations". Likewise with Walter Rodney, who coined 'guerrilla intellectualism' (Adeleke, 2000; Rodney, 1972), the radical thought of scholar activism should inspire us all to evoke meaningful and transformative change. We cannot disconnect the link between power and knowledge in the academic domain of knowledge production. In recognising this connection between knowledge and power, we should use that to reclaim power and resist structures that are adamant in silencing our voices.

However, is it possible to conduct transformative and radical anti-racist work in the confines of inherently racist institutions? In being present in these institutions, are we challenging the epistemic structures that contribute to racial violence, or are we complicit in normalising these structures? If we were to engage with marginalised communities in our research, the bureaucratic practices of academic institutions – through the false pretences of ethics, rigour, risk and reward – diminish the emancipatory praxis of our work (Joseph-Salisbury & Connelly, 2021). The academic structures of research enforce control over our community, in a way that is disempowering of the wider community and asserts the authority of the researcher (and the research institution), through the overarching academic duty to be 'morally objective' (Becker & Aiello, 2013; Stacey, 1988).

By recognising the shortfalls of this 'sharp white background', Joseph-Salisbury (2018) instead argues the importance of rooting our work with the wider communities in outlining how academics can be scholar-activists. We want to challenge the idea of academic researchers as "core knowers" and with local and

primarily non-White communities serving as "research subjects" (Johnson, 2018). As their experiences of struggle are collected, the studied individuals become objectified as blank figures embodying data. Academics capitalise on their data to publish in prestigious journals and secure funding to research "underrepresented populations", but the imbalance of power between marginalised communities and the White academe becomes palpable. As anti-racist scholars, we want to bring marginalised groups to the centre of our work – allowing lived experiences to inform our research in a collaborative, emancipative, and non-extractive manner. Instead of engaging members of our communities as participants, we should engage with them as partners – activists, organisers, or members with lived experiences, and use scholarship to uplift our collective voices in a way that is not extractive but empowering.

As anti-racist scholars, we should fight back against the current monopoly on knowledge by academic institutions. To echo the words of Paulo Freire (1993: 53), "liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information". Knowledge is meant to be shared meaningfully to empower ourselves and seek liberation, not to be capitalised by the culturally and racially privileged.

Conclusion

It is evident how knowledge production becomes monopolised by academic institutions as elite actors in society, and how the cultural and social capital of the academe symbolises that power. The monopoly of knowledge production asserts how it can be exploited for societal divide and maintain uneven power relations. We must, however, claim back that power in order to dismantle the present hierarchy that exists to perpetuate racial and other forms of structural violence. In answering the question, "who has the capital on knowledge production", it is clear how academic institutions in Europe and North America take over as that primary domain of knowledge by sustaining themselves as the 'centre' of world knowledge. However, it does not have to remain that way. While knowledge has historically been utilised to assert power through west-centrism and whiteness, it may also be used as a tool of resistance. If recent transnational movements have shown us anything – including Rhodes Must Fall, 'Why is my Curriculum White?' and Black Lives Matter – it is that we do not and should not continue with these current systems of racial violence.

As I write this article, I am conscious that there is no easy fix to a system that has been normalised, enshrined, and embedded for centuries – and a journal such as *Stolen Tools* does not intend to replace or fix the current problem in academic scholarship. Rather, I write this as a way of questioning and invoking an important discussion on knowledge production and scholarship. Particularly, how do we conduct anti-racist scholarship that is meaningful and enact transformative change in our communities, groups, and societies? How do we begin to dismantle the master's house and the tools that come with it (Lorde, 2019)? Reclaiming our voices in our current scholarship might be the first step. I conclude with an important, and timely, quote by anticolonial thinker Frantz Fanon (2008[1952]), who emphasises that, "what matters is not to know the world, but to change it".

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