

PGCAP Research Project

Title: Reloading the Archaeological Canon: Decolonising the Undergraduate Archaeology Curriculum

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Introduction

In 2014, students at University College London (UCL) created a powerful video titled: “Why is My Curriculum White?” This video was in response to the National Union of Students (NUS) Black Students Campaign National Students Survey, wherein it was found that 42% of BAME students “did not believe their curriculum reflected issues of diversity, equality and discrimination” (2011, 3). In the same report the NUS recommended that, “institutions must strive to minimise Euro-centric bias in curriculum design, content and delivery and to establish mechanisms to ensure this happens” (National Union of Students, 2011, 60). Sadly there is little evidence that this recommendation has been implemented within the discipline of archaeology within the United Kingdom, or had any impact on what is considered the canon of literature within the field.

In archaeology, the canon can be understood as the body of literature that is recognised as the core of the discipline. The canon is built from generations of scholars passing on literature that was imparted on them by their teachers and advisors, supplemented by other sources encountered during their studies. This latter category seems to imply some independence, but is also filtered by availability in the library, book shop, or language in which the resource was published, particularly before the internet. These various factors circumscribe the literature within archaeology that is taught and cited. As with many fields, academic archaeology was primarily (though not entirely) practised by wealthy men during the founding of the discipline. In recent years, women have formed the majority of the degree-earners in archaeology, but still have not reached parity within senior, managerial and professorial posts (Cobb and Croucher 2016). Still, the demographics within archaeology have been growing

more diverse, yet many are taught from the same canon of literature that was produced and propagated through the predominantly white western men who have comprised the majority of the profession. Additionally, as Hutson (2002) has demonstrated, even when women are represented within the literature, they are cited less by both women and men. Citation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) and indigenous archaeologists is negligible. In this context, there is a growing concern regarding the lack of representation of women, BAME and indigenous scholars within the archaeological canon.

To address this concern I have identified the following research questions: does the assigned reading in the Department of Archaeology at the University of York reflect the diversity of researchers within the discipline? How does the assigned reading compare to other similar institutions, such as the Institute of Archaeology at University College - London (UCL)? Finally, if there is a lack of diversity apparent within the syllabus, can the Department implement changes to better reflect current thinking in the field? To answer these questions I first employ a limited literature review regarding diversity and representation in scholarship. Then I review the undergraduate reading lists assigned by the Department of Archaeology at the University of York to assess the relative representation within coursework assigned within the department. I will then compare this to a sample taken from UCL. I then collate this data, discuss the results, then make recommendations for future practice within the department and amongst academic archaeology institutions.

Literature Review

Addressing diversity and representation in scholarship can be framed in part as decolonizing the curriculum. As Bhambra and colleagues note, decolonising refers to “a way of thinking about the world which takes colonialism, empire and racism as its empirical and discursive objects of study,” and “purports to offer alternative ways of thinking about the world and alternative forms of political praxis” (2018, 2). This is particularly relevant as the Western university is “a key site through which colonialism...is produced, consecrated, institutionalised and naturalised” (Bhambra et al. 2018, 5). While arguing for an Afrocentric curriculum in Ghana, Asante states, “Eurocentrism is not simply racism; it is a superstructure that seeks to impose European consciousness onto other people’s consciousness” (2012, 43). Though many decolonising efforts have been focused in the former British colonies, decolonising the university has only recently become a concern within the United Kingdom.

Gillborn (2007) examines institutional racism and white supremacy in UK educational policy, noting that “those who are implicated in whiteness rarely even realize its existence--let alone their own role in its repeated iteration and resignification” (2007, 490). This is significant for this research--is not my intention to imply that lecturers collecting university reading lists were intentionally privileging white, male authors but that it is the perpetuation of normative experiences formed at the outset of the discipline. Black students in England are thoroughly segregated, systemically under-served, discriminated against by their teachers and while other

ethnic minorities do relatively well, white students are deeply privileged (Gillborn 2007, 496). Though it is a minor point in the context of this extreme inequity, Gillborn recommends broadening the curriculum (2007, 499) as one potential intervention to combat white supremacy in UK education. Further, the NUS states that “a multicultural curricula not only helps to promote inclusion, but also the academic achievement of Black students” (National Union of Students 2011, 20).

As the protest video, “Why is My Curriculum White?” demonstrated, the literature assigned within coursework should be a subject of scrutiny while attempting to decolonise the university. The anti-racist protest movement *Rhodes Must Fall* (and *Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford*) demanded reformation of the “Euro-centric curriculum to remedy the highly selective narrative of traditional academia...by integrating subjugated and local epistemologies...this will create a more intellectually rigorous, complete academy” (Peters 2018, 266). However Brookfield cites Herbert Marcuse’s concept of repressive tolerance to argue that inserting an alternative idea into a curriculum of mainstream materials exoticizes and undercuts the consideration of diverse perspectives (2007, 560). He asserts that “the logic of liberating or discriminating tolerance would require an immersion only in a racial or cultural tradition that diverged radically from mainstream ideology” (2007, 561). Brookfield’s strongly stated argument that, “there are times when tolerating different views is not only intellectually vapid, but also does active harm” (2007, 567) and positing an objective truth as a liberatory truth (565) are compelling, but ultimately seems to re-establish mainstream scholarship as objective truth, and educators as the purveyors of this pure objectivity. This is underscored by the *Why is My Curriculum White* movement and other decolonisation efforts being generated by students demanding diverse perspectives.

Within archaeology, efforts have been made to decolonise archaeological knowledge production within the subfields of feminist archaeology, indigenous archaeology, and queer archaeology, but this has been limited to the interpretation of the archaeological record and collaboration with local communities. Hamilakis argues that pedagogy in archaeology is “a socially crucial and politically contested field of cultural production, the effects and implications of which permeate everything we do in archaeology” (2004, 288), but addresses the delivery of the coursework rather than the assigned literature. Cobb and Croucher (2016) also emphasise the political and contested nature of archaeological pedagogy and discuss the need to incorporate diversity in approaches to fieldwork and pedagogy, but do not address the content of the assigned reading lists. As such, the curricula within archaeology need to be examined with a specific intent to examining which ideas are forming our understanding of the past.

Methodology

To address the need to decolonise the curriculum in archaeology, I assessed the reading lists assigned to first-year undergraduates within the Department of Archaeology at the University

of York, noting two metrics: 1) Perceived Gender, and 2) Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) (see appendix 1). At times these metrics were difficult to determine. Assigning perceived identities was an uncomfortable exercise, but there was not time within the assessment to email each of the authors individually and ask how they should be identified. Some archaeological reports did not attribute authorship. Additionally, I only recorded data regarding the first three authors articles; in the case of scientific journal articles, I recorded data regarding the first/corresponding author and the last author, as this is generally the lead investigator of the article and the senior author/supervisor, respectively. After gathering these metrics on spreadsheets I assessed each of the courses independently for their inclusion of diverse voices. Finally, I compared this data to data gathered from an Introduction to Archaeology reading list assigned to first-year undergraduates at the Institute of Archaeology at UCL. By doing this I hoped to gain a more general idea of practice within the field, particularly as UCL is the home institution for the *Why is My Curriculum White* movement.

Data Collected

All first year undergraduates in Archaeology at York take the following modules: Accessing Archaeology, Prehistory to the Present, Field Archaeology, History and Theory, and Introduction to Archaeological Science. Additionally, first year students take the Archaeological Excavation and/or Heritage Practice modules during their summer term, as determined by their degree structure. I have omitted these latter two modules as not all students take them and as they are heavily practice-based, there is less literature to evaluate.

The Accessing Archaeology autumn module introduces undergraduates to archaeological methodology in a seminar setting. Each week a different investigatory technique is reviewed and discussed in groups of 11-13, led by a graduate teaching assistant. The assigned reading is from a textbook and students present two case studies drawn from journal articles. There were 49 assigned readings; of these, 11/49 of the first authors were women and none were BAME (figure 1).



Figure 1: Accessing Archaeology, first authors

Prehistory to the Present is an autumn module that provides an overview of archaeological approaches to different time periods through eight 2-hour lectures. These lectures are by different lecturers and their approaches to assigning readings vary. Generally there were 2-3 articles listed under “key reading” and a more extensive “further reading” list as well. There were 99 assigned readings, 23/99 of the first authors were women and none were BAME authors (figure 2).

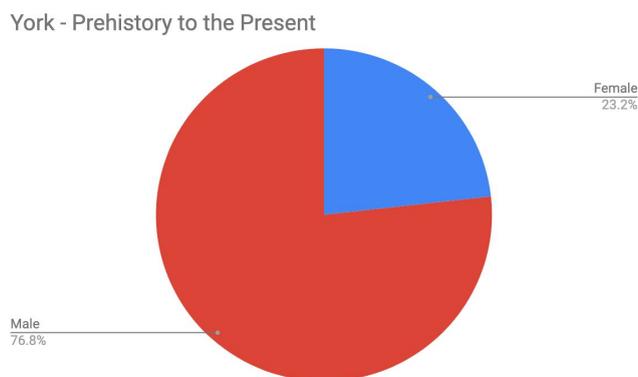


Figure 2: Prehistory to the Present, first authors

The Field Archaeology module runs in both autumn and spring terms and is a series of lectures regarding collecting archaeological data through fieldwork. Out of 82 assigned readings covering both terms, 13/82 were by female first authors and none were by BAME authors (Figure 3).

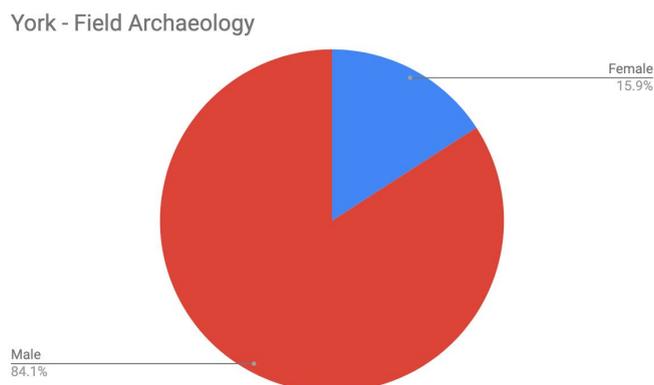


Figure 3: Field Archaeology, first authors

History and Theory is a spring-term module that introduces students to the philosophy that underpins archaeology. There are 16 lectures and 15 seminars, each one hour long. The lecture provides overviews of the concepts and the seminars allow students to discuss the literature. Many of the lectures are given by different lecturers, with some overlap. Accordingly, the assigned literature varies. Out of 109 assigned readings, 23/109 have female first authors (figure 4) and 3/109 are by BAME authors (figure 5).

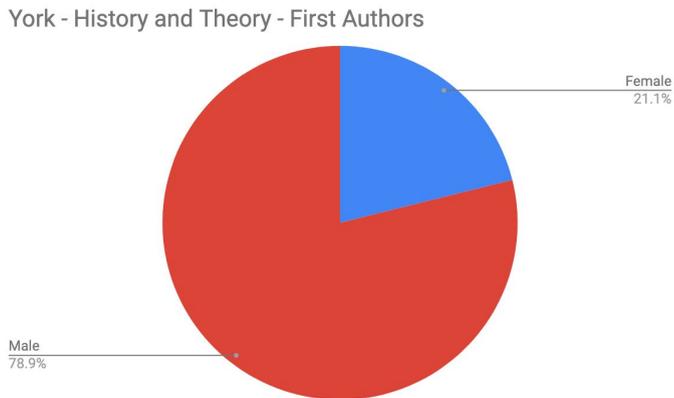


Figure 4: History and Theory, first authors

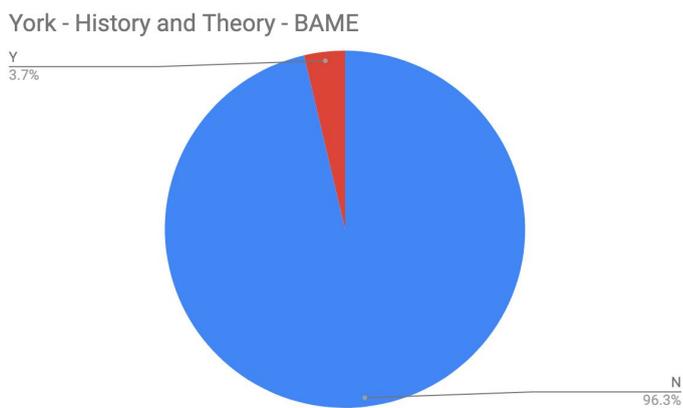


Figure 5: History and Theory, BAME authors

Introduction to Archaeological Science is a spring-term module that reviews scientific techniques for examining archaeological data. There are eight 2-hour lectures and four 1-hour workshops. Many of the lectures are given by different lecturers, with some overlap. Out of 56 assigned readings, 17/56 had a female first author (figure 6) and there were no BAME authors.

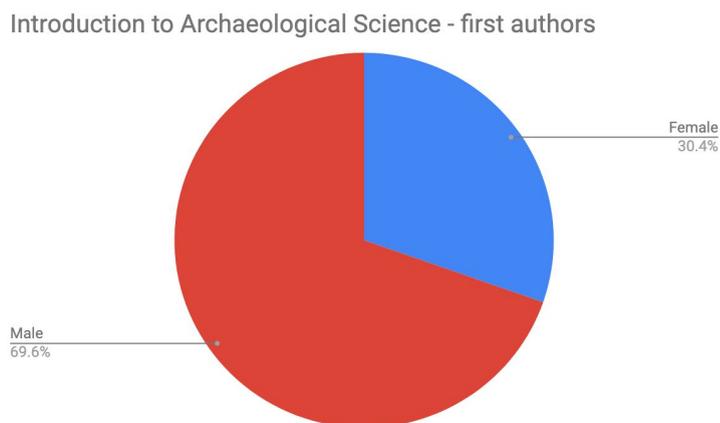


Figure 6: Introduction to Archaeological Science, first authors

To compare the rate of assigning reading by female and BAME authors, I also reviewed the Introduction to Archaeology course taught at the Institute of Archaeology at UCL in 2018/2019. The reading list is freely available to download from their website (see also appendix 2). The course is convened by one lecturer and several other lecturers provide lectures. There are 10 two-hour lectures; however most of these two-hour slots are divided into two one-hour lectures by different lecturers. There are five one-hour seminars throughout the term with different themes. In reviewing the reading, I drew from the lists that corresponded with the specific lectures, as there were additional supplementary reading lists that were not connected with these lectures, as I did not review similar additional reading lists in the York dataset. A colossal 178 readings were assigned during the term, 31/178 had a female first author (figure 7) and 1/178 was a BAME author (figure 8).

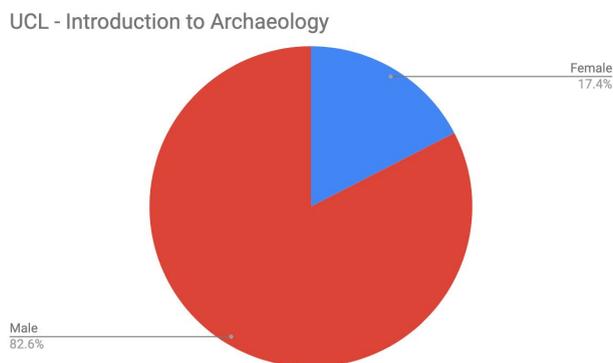


Figure 7: UCL, Introduction to Archaeology, female first author

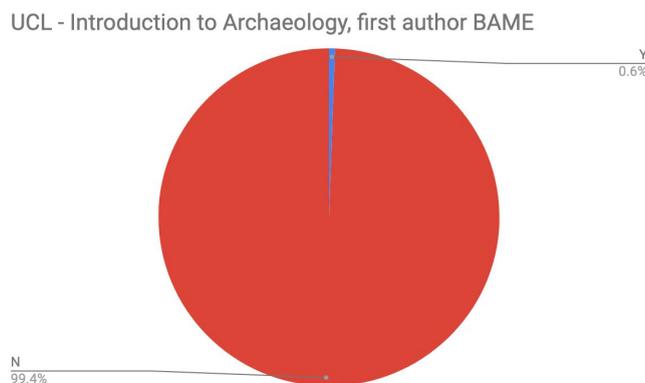


Figure 8: UCL, Introduction to Archaeology, BAME first author

Discussion

Collectively, the autumn and spring term coursework in Archaeology at York assigned reading by female first authors 22% of the time (87/308) (figure 9) and BAME authors 1.3% of the time (4/308). This compares positively to the UCL Introduction to Archaeology figures

(though York is an aggregate and UCL may assign more diverse authors in additional courses) and, given more research into reading lists across the UK, might be viewed as average or even good, considering the founding of the profession.

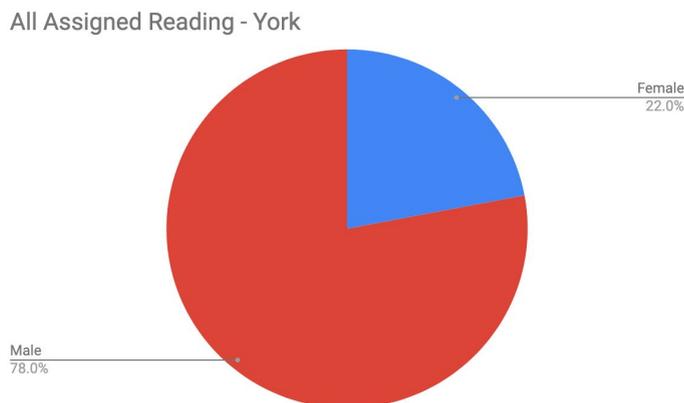


Figure 9: All Assigned Reading in Autumn and Spring at York

Yet in research conducted in 2013, academic roles in archaeology are divided more evenly, 46% female and 54% male (Aitchison and Rocks-McQueen 2013). Gender parity was expected across archaeology (incorporating commercial, educational, and other sectors) in 2017-2018 and women were to be the majority of the workforce by 2022 (97) (Aitchison and Rocks-McQueen 2013). Research conducted during the same time period on publication and gender in archaeology in the United States revealed a similar gender division, 47% female and 53% male, but also showed a considerable gap in publication rates (Bardolph 2014). Out of 4,552 articles and reports from 11 peer-reviewed journals published between 1990 and 2013, 71.4% were authored by men as the first author and 28.6% by women (Bardolph 2014). A similar study has not been conducted within the UK. Out of the courses surveyed, only Introduction to Archaeological Science surpasses the 28.6% mark of scholarship authored by women, with 30.4% of the reading by women as first authors.

Though female first authors comprise 22% of the overall assigned reading in Archaeology at York, this percentage is considerably lower upon further examination of some of the lists. Many of the modules assign reading in two categories: “essential” or “key” reading and “further” reading. The percentages cited above are aggregates of both categories. When separated out, several modules had lower percentages; for example, Field Archaeology, formerly at 15.9% women, dipped to 11.4% when only “essential” reading was evaluated. However some of the modules, Introduction to Archaeological Science and History and Theory had higher percentages, 32% and 28.1%, respectively. Another pattern that was perceived was that of female lecturers assigning more literature with first author women, but a larger dataset would be required to verify this trend.

Though female first authors arguably fare relatively well in the assigned reading, sadly BAME authors are hardly present. The Landward Research report of the workforce found

only 1% of archaeologists in 2013 to be BAME, fewer than other cultural heritage sectors (Aitchison and Rocks-McQueen 2013), though in a 2011 census 13% of the general UK population were BAME (Gov.uk 2019). This bears out in the data collected on the assigned reading; in their first year, students encounter BAME authors in only one module: History and Theory. These authors are almost all (3/4) within the seminar on Indigenous Archaeology. This segregation recalls Brookfield's argument that attempts to integrate curriculum by inserting minority authors into a dominant narrative further marginalises the ideas of the minority authors (2007). Further, though there are very few BAME archaeologists in the UK, curriculums are increasingly globalised. There is an unprecedented level of access to literature from across the globe, even when circumscribed by Anglophone requirements.

When reviewed against larger demographic data of archaeologists in the profession, the reading lists within the York Department of Archaeology do not represent an equal distribution for female or BAME archaeologists. In aggregate, York's reading lists also fall short of the gender divide in publication in archaeology (22% vs 28%) (Bardolph 2014). Though York compares well to the limited sample taken from UCL, more work could be done to respond to feedback from the NUS and diversify York's undergraduate curriculum.

Finally, this research could have been improved in several respects. First, this was a relatively limited examination of the data, particularly after the relatively extensive data collection. A more in-depth investigation of second authors might have showed collaborative projects with female and BAME researchers, though it would not have changed the power dynamics implied by the name order of citation. Further research regarding the actual impact of these reading lists could be conducted by investigating the citations the students use in their assessments, and perhaps in their dissertations. A broader survey of reading lists assigned to first-year undergraduates in archaeology across the United Kingdom might have added evidence to the argument as well. Finally, the approach of quantifying representation is not above critique, as noted by the previous citation of Brookfield (2007); Mott and Cockayne also caution us to be "wary of strategies that further attune us to the quantification of the neoliberal university and regimes of accounting" (2017, 962).

Conclusions

To paraphrase bell hooks' (2000) famous statement: *archaeology is for everybody*. The study of the past is the study of all of us, and it is imperative to incorporate diverse perspectives to provide more comprehensive and substantial interpretations of the past. Unfortunately the assigned reading in the Department of Archaeology at the University of York does not reflect the diversity of researchers within the discipline. While it compares well to the assigned reading at the Institute of Archaeology at UCL, it still falls short of equivalent representation in the field. With this examination of the reading assigned to first year undergraduates at York, I did not intend to catch my colleagues out, or to proscribe strict regulations regarding

setting the curriculum. My goal was to investigate one small, but vital aspect of knowledge production in archaeology, that of forming the canon of archaeological literature through setting curricula. The canon is archaeology's own creation story, repeated and handed down through successive generations of scholars. While discussing the canon within geography, Maddrell (2015) notes the systematic erasure of women scholars, even despite critical success in their own day and consequently encourages reexamination and engagement with alternative literature. The first year of undergraduate education is a critical time to form the archaeological canon that students will take forward and replicate, or repudiate in time.

This research has shown the systematic underrepresentation of women and BAME scholarship within archaeology reading lists. The data collection for this project involved painstaking research: most citation systems are not set up to easily identify authors by gender or ethnicity. It also included the uncomfortable responsibility of assigning gender and ethnic status to researchers based on their images or their names. A better, more robust citation system that allowed researchers to self-identify, and for citations to include at least full names would contribute to more immediately transparent knowledge production. This would also aid assessment by the Gender Balance Assessment Tool, a website created by Jane Lawrence Sumner that can provide a gender break down based on a text document--but only if the document includes first names (2019). For example, the website has determined that the bibliography for this paper has 42.53% citations from women and 76.67% white (figure 10).

Your assigned readings are approximately

42.53

percent woman-authored.

Race breakdown (probabilistic)

0.5% Asian, 16.33% Black, 1.49% Hispanic,

2.02% Other, 79.67% White

Figure 10: Gender Balance Assessment Tool assessment of this paper

Finally, to respond to the concerns emerging from “Why is My Curriculum White?” Universities Scotland revised their Race Equality Toolkit. In their guidance on Embedding Race Equality into the Curriculum, Universities Scotland makes several recommendations, including “adopting an internationalist approach,” “using case studies” and “including race equality and diversity as part of the core curriculum, not as a ‘bolt-on’ addition.” (Universities Scotland 2015). All of these recommendations could be incorporated into creating more diverse reading lists and teaching for first-year undergraduates in Archaeology at York.

Looking forward, there is some hope of implementing changes within Archaeology at York. The Accessing Archaeology and Field Archaeology modules are undergoing major changes

for next year with regard to content and would benefit from updated reading lists. Awareness of gender balance and diversity within the assigned literature at the outset could help remedy some of the imbalances of citation, recognition, and reward in archaeology. Critical examination of our academic lineages and knowledge production could shape our teaching and research to better reflect current thinking in the field.

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