The Lived Experience of Black International Students at a Post-1992 University in England: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Academic Resilience

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Social justice, Equality, Inclusion, Social mobility

My background...

Dr Patrice Seuwou

- **Associate Professor in Learning and Teaching**
- Deputy Head of Subject Group Business Systems & Operations
- Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy
- Co-Lead - Inclusion, Diversity and Special Education SIG, Centre for Education and Research
- **Centre for the Advancement of Racial Equality**
- Deputy director of the Systems, Analytics and Business Intelligence (SABI) Research Group
- External Examiner for Open University & Staffordshire university
- QAA Assessor
- Contributing Writer to Times Higher Education| Author | EDI Trainer

Selected Publications:

- Seuwou, P (2023) Ten Actions Universities in the UK can take to improve the experiences of their Black students *Times Higher Education*. (https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/ten-actions-improve-experiences-black-students-within-uk-universities)
- Seuwou, P, Sarwar, D, Pilkington (2023) The Lived Experience of Black International Students at a Post-1992 University in England: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Academic Resilience, INTED 2023 conference
- Seuwou, P, Sarwar, D, Pilkington (2022) A Phenomenological Exploration of the Holistic Experiences of Students of African Descent at a Post-1992 University in England, ICERI2022 Proceedings ISBN: 978-84-09-45476-1
- Dzineku, C & Seuwou, P (2022), 'Action to improve diversity and inclusion for Black students and staff' *Times Higher Education*. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/action-improve-diversity-and-inclusion-black-students-and-staff>
- Seuwou, P, Dodzo, N., Osho, Y., Ajaefobi, W., Sarwar, D, Pilkington, A & Daye, M (2022), Exploring the Factors that Impact on BAME students Attainment at a Post-1992 University in England, Studies in Education journal (*under Peer review process*)
- Seuwou, P, Dodzo, N., Osho, Y., Ajaefobi, W., Sarwar, D, Pilkington, A & Daye, M (2022), Widening Participation in HE: Exploring the Factors that Impact on BAME students Attainment at a Post-1992 University in England, *Proceedings of EDULEARN22 Conference 4th-6th July 2022, Palma, Mallorca, Spain ISBN: 978-84-09-42484-9*
- Seuwou, P., Ajani, R. (2022) 'Experiences and Challenges of Africans Diaspora in Great Britain and their Role in the Future Development of Africa', African Development Perspectives: A Holistic Reflection, Austin Macauley Publishers

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- Higher education (HE) has the potential to improve the lives of the disadvantaged by enhancing social mobility (Vignoles and Murray, 2016).

- Key reformers: Wilhelm von Humboldt (1810); Cardinal John Henry Newman (1852)
- 605,100 international students (UK Parliament)
- A single cohort of international students contributes £25.9 billion net.

- The 1963 Lord Robbins report
- The 1997 Lord Dearing Report
- The 2021 Sewell report: Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities

- Substantial inequalities still persist throughout the student lifecycle

INCLUSION

BELONGING

EQUITY   DIVERSITY
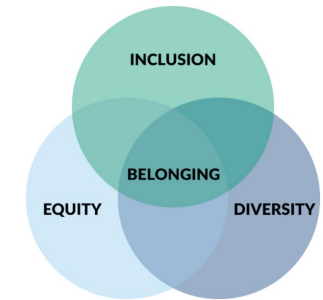
According to the 2021 Census, the total population of England and Wales was 59.6 million, and 81.7% of the population was white.

● 2011   ● 2021

Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh
- **7.5%** (4.2 million) — 2011
- **9.3%** (5.5 million) — 2021

Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African
- **3.3%** (1.9 million) — 2011
- **4.0%** (2.4 million) — 2021

Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups
- **2.2%** (1.2 million) — 2011
- **2.9%** (1.7 million) — 2021

Other ethnic group
- **1.0%** (564,000) — 2011
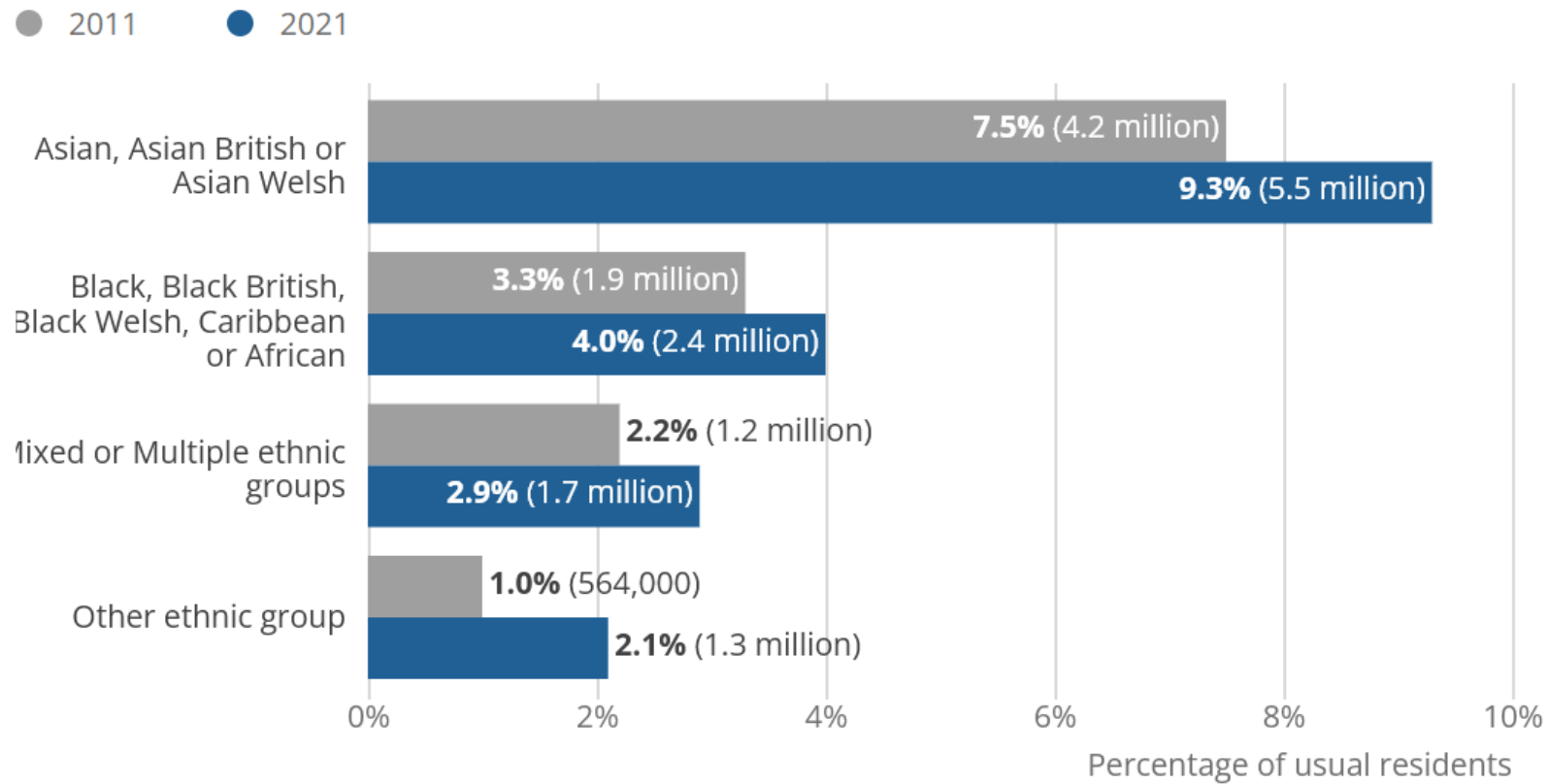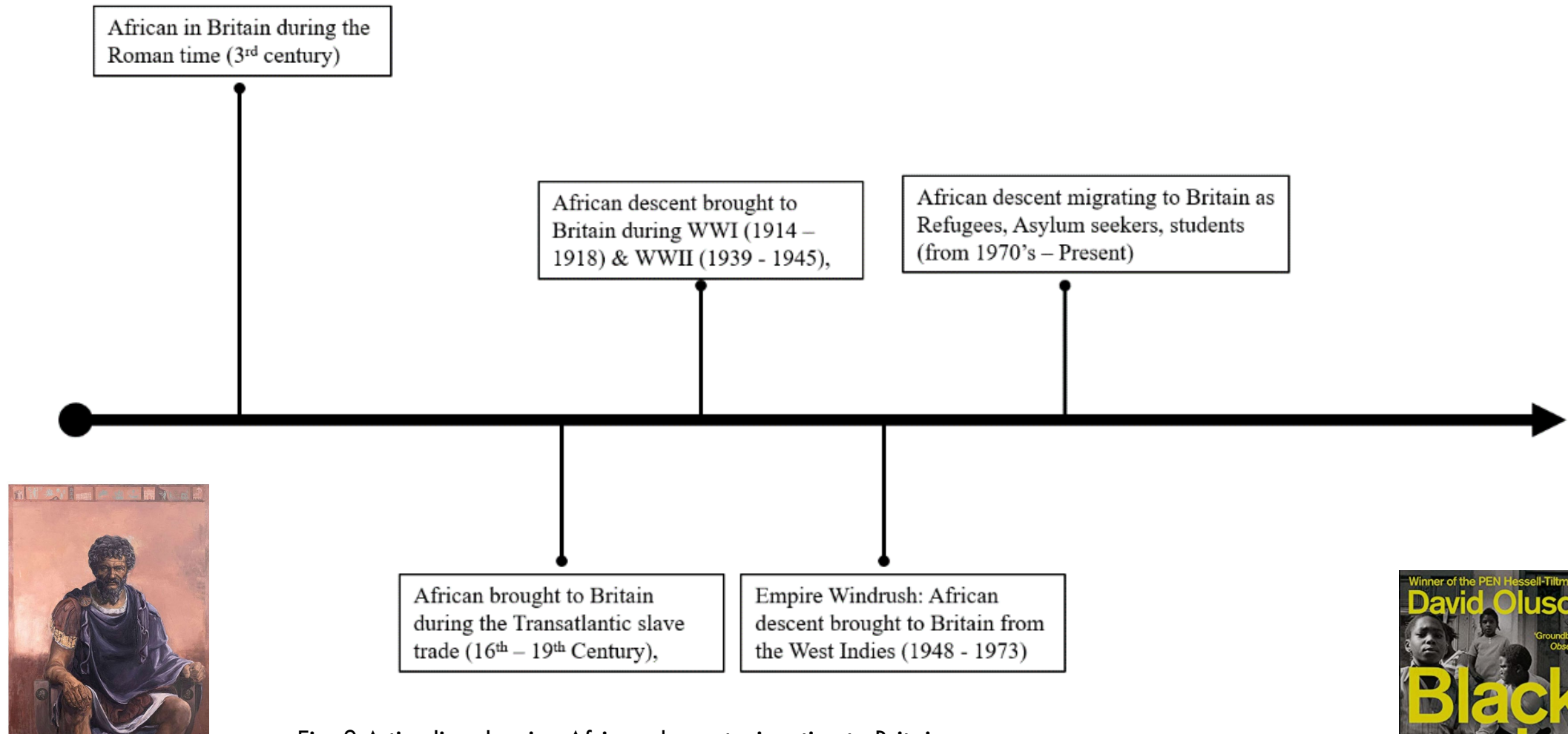- **2.1%** (1.3 million) — 2021

Percentage of usual residents

Fig 1. Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021
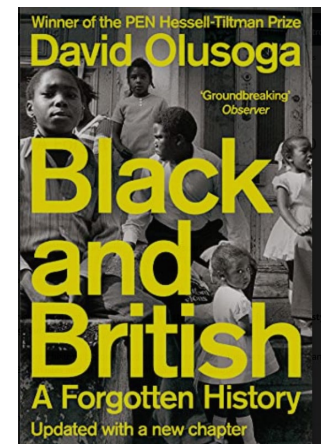**Ethnic group distribution (high-level categories), 2011 and 2021, England and Wales**

A timeline showing African descent migration to Britain

Inspired from the work of historian **David Olusoga**

African in Britain during the Roman time (3rd century)

African descent brought to Britain during WWI (1914 – 1918) & WWII (1939 - 1945),

African descent migrating to Britain as Refugees, Asylum seekers, students (from 1970's – Present)

African brought to Britain during the Transatlantic slave trade (16th – 19th Century),

Empire Windrush: African descent brought to Britain from the West Indies (1948 - 1973)

AD 193, **Lucius Septimius Severus**

Fig. 2 A timeline showing African descent migration to Britain (Seuwou & Ajani, 2022)

Winner of the PEN Hessell-Tiltman Prize
David Olusoga
'Groundbreaking'
Observer
Black and British
A Forgotten History
Updated with a new chapter

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Teaching Boot and Shoe students
Northampton College of Technology c.1950's

Technical drawing
Northampton School of Art 1959

Senior Typing Class, 1960
Northampton College of Technology

Students relaxing by the Brampton
Building, School of Health 1992

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

Within the last ten years, we've seen…

- Increasing competition

- A growing number Black students on campus coming from London

Once upon a time the University would have served the county of Northamptonshire's needs….

Our UK domiciled FT undergraduate students identify ethnically as 55% white, 28.7% Black and Black British, 7.3% Asian and Asian British, 6.3% identify as other ethnicities or as being of mixed ethnicity, and the ethnic identity of 2.3% is unknown.

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- The main objectives of this investigations are as follows:

1.   To identify the challenges faced as foreign Black students in higher education, including racism and other forms of discrimination.

2.   To examine students' potential experiences of educational, cultural adjustments ("Third culture identity") and transitioning while pursuing their studies in higher education

3.   To explore their strategies for coping with the challenges in Higher Education

4.   To make policy recommendations, at the micro, meso and macro levels, on how to effectively achieve the objectives of WP in UK HEI for students of African descent and GEM community in general.
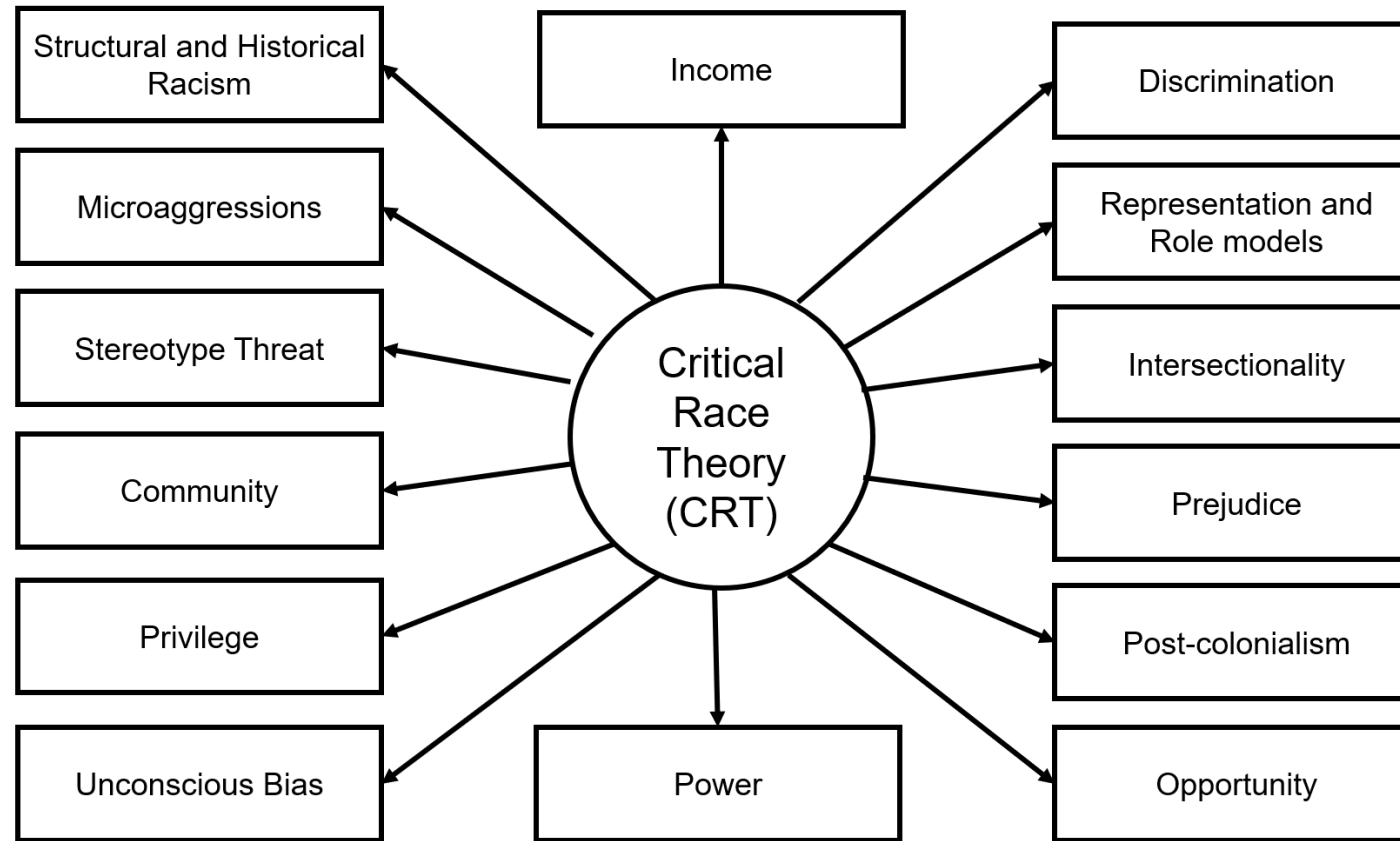
Stuart Hall (cultural theorist)
Jamaican-born British Marxist sociologist, cultural theorist and political activist

- **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**
- Concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experience and the meaning of that experience as expressed by the individual in his or her own terms, without any pre-defined categories (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). – Borrowed from Psychology
- **Ontological position:** Social Constructivism
- **Epistemological position:** Interpretivism
- **Qualitative**
- **Sample Selection**
  - Purposive: International Black students (Post 92 University)
  - Homogenous - sharing similar characteristics
  - Size - 7 participants: data collection
- **Data Collection Method**
  - In-depth interviews with participants at all level (Undergraduate & Postgraduate level)
- **Ethical issues**

Edmund Husserl / Martin Heidegger

Structural and Historical Racism

Microaggressions

Stereotype Threat

Community

Privilege

Unconscious Bias

Income

Power

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Discrimination

Representation and Role models

Intersectionality

Prejudice

Post-colonialism

Opportunity

a cross-disciplinary intellectual and social movement of civil-rights scholars and activists who seek to examine the intersection of race, society, and law

Fig. 3 An Illustration of the key building blocks of the Critical Race Theory

Adapted from Adrienne et al, 2017)

Structural Functionalism theory
Critical race Theory

Imperialism and Colonialism

- Imperialism/Colonialism: a policy of conquering and ruling other lands
- It existed from the very beginning of mankind's history
- From 1870, the industrial powers carried out an astonishing expansion, building up worldwide empires
- Conference of Berlin in 1884

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Challenges Faced by Black Students in HE

- Financial difficulties

- Deficit model

- Cultural adjustment

- Different education systems and assessment standards for international students

- Accommodation living black

- Academic misconduct offences

- Access to university services

- Mental health issues

- Racism and discrimination

Video → **Yale Study Shows Pre-School Teachers Single Out Black Boys The Most!** (1:36 mins)

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Discrimination, racism and Self-doubt

- Black students continuously experience, fight against and bear emotional scars from racism, which can lead to increased anxiety and poor mental health outcomes.

- Less favourable treatment due to ethnicity

- No perception of overt racism (note of caution)

- Modification of personal behaviour to 'fit' in

- White students or staffs talking over you.

- **Code-switching**

Video → Subconscious racial bias in children (3.54 mins)

Colourism - Tribalism

Prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group.

Decolonisation/Internationalisation of Curriculum

- Decolonizing goes beyond just changing the content of university curricula. It's about adding voices in a way that connects to existing debates.

- Have marginalised voices been erased or hidden in plain sight?

In March 2016, students at Oxford University called for the removal of a statue of Cecil Rhodes and for education to be decolonised.

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Black People Representation in the Media

Met has 'nowhere to hide' after damning Casey report, say campaigners

20 March 2023

Louise Casey arriving at Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre for the press briefing of her review on 20 March. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images
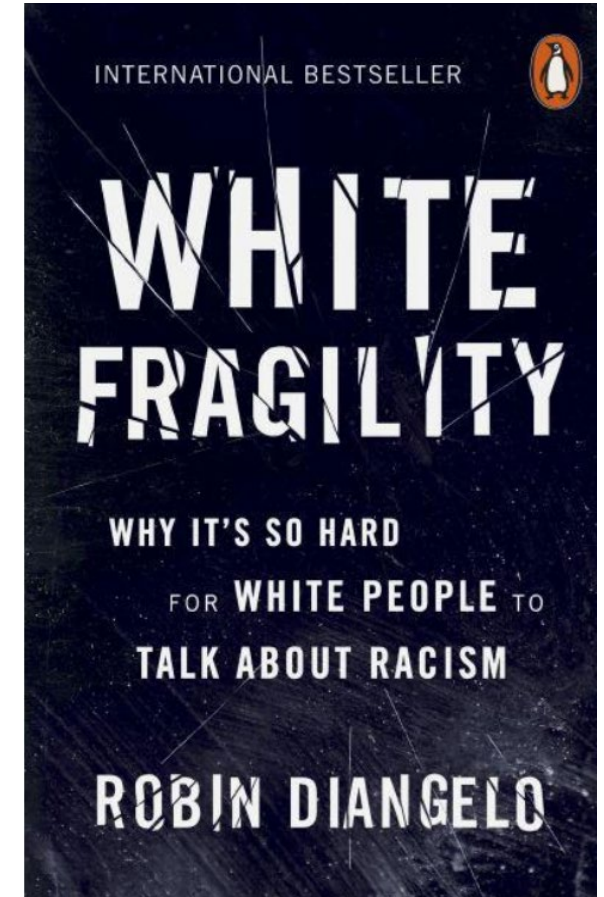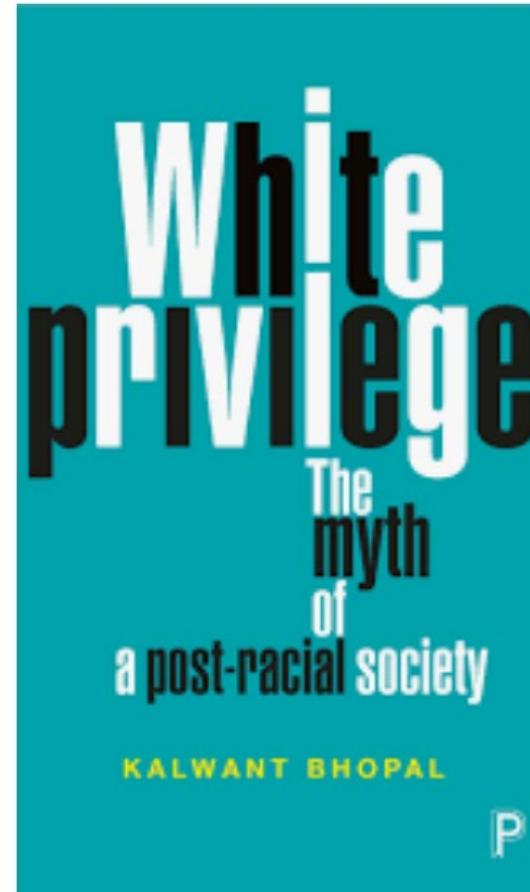

- Dame Louise Casey's 300-page report found institutional misogyny, racism and homophobia persists within Britain's biggest police force.

- The report was commissioned by the Met in the wake of the kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by the serving police officer Wayne Couzens.

- Andrea Simon, director of the End Violence Against Women Coalition, said: "This damning report leaves the Met nowhere to hide when it comes to the depth of its problems with institutional misogyny, racism and homophobia.

- "There is however a long history of such revelations about the Met – including on undercover policing stretching back to the 1980s and beyond, to the findings of the Macpherson report, and numerous police inspectorate reports since – we demand that today's report finally initiates a tangible shift in the operation of policing in the UK. If not now, then when and at what cost?"

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White Privilege – White Fragility

Make the uncomfortable comfortable

"Having white privilege doesn't mean that your life isn't difficult; it simply means that your skin color isn't one of the things contributing to your life difficulties"

**Shola M Richards,
Workplace Civility Activist**

white privilege
The myth of a post-racial society

KALWANT BHOPAL

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

WHITE FRAGILITY

WHY IT'S SO HARD FOR WHITE PEOPLE TO TALK ABOUT RACISM

ROBIN DIANGELO

White Fragility Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism: Difficult Conversations

Privilege isn't about what you **have gone through,** it's about what you **haven't had to go through**

Key Observations

- Black students find it difficult to relate to the large proportion of course content and references used on some programmes.

- Students sighted examples of what they considered as intentional and unintentional 'microaggressions' prior to coming to university and during their time at the university.

- A noticeable lack of Black staff representation in most departments

- Academic support services not diverse in staff, however, very helpful to those who see them.

- Links between family responsibilities, socio-economic background and effects of commuting on attainment

The Impact Of Racism On Mental Health:

Feeling disconnected / lonely

Second-guessing things

Decreased hope (in the future, justice, the government etc.)

Increased "Survival Mode"

Decreased trust

Worry

Increase risk of depression and anxiety

Trauma (both from the present and triggering past instances / generational trauma)

Existential questioning "How can the world be so cruel?"

Feelings of powerlessness (You can do the right thing and still end up with a horrific outcome)

Panic

#BlackLivesMatter

@RealDepressionProject

THE DEPRESSION PROJECT

IF WE WANT TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH

WE NEED TO dig deeper

@ALYSERURIANI

INTERSECTIONAL

social justice

MEDICAL MODEL

INDIVIDUALISM

PHARMA   DSM   PATHOLOGIZATION

discrimination

VIOLENCE   ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES   UNSAFE ENVIRONMENT

fatphobia   isolation   criminalization

socio-economic status   marginalization   ableism   colorism   stress   inequality   VOTER SUPPRESSION

NEGLECT POVERTY   lack of resources   UNMET NEEDS

FOOD INSECURITY   transphobia   sexism   diet culture   OPPRESSION   WHITE SUPREMACY

XENOPHOBIA   homophobia   RACISM

disasters   injustice   coercion   sexual assault   AGEISM   abuse

war   anti-native

trauma   MASS INCARCERATION

colonization   access to HOUSING & HEALTHCARE & EDUCATION   denied RIGHTS

POLICE BRUTALITY   climate change   ANTI-SEMITISM   social & legal exclusion

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Quotes from students (1)

*"I live in London with my family, and then **I commute when I have class**. I cannot afford to rent by myself in this town. I can save on my rent. London is about […] from here, so it is not too far. I really appreciate spending time with my family and taking care of my younger sister. My mum is a single mum you know. […] It can be sometimes challenging to be on time due to train delay. Sometimes the lecturer will not let us in the class when we are late. I sometimes have to leave early to catch my train back to London […]" ~ Black Caribbean female - Lia*

*Aggressive Stigma; **the black angry girl**: I don't think I come across threatening, I don't think I ever show that kind of attitude, but obviously a lot of stigmas around black people is that they are aggressive and we will lash out. So, I got excluded for three days. It was internal exclusion but I had to be chaperoned around all day and the other student wasn't black but she was actually the person who would 'bullying me' so I was the victim! Black Caribbean female- Fanta*

Quotes from students (2)

*In all the lectures I have attended during my master, all **case studies my teachers have used are always related to UK or US**, we come in here, spending a lot of money for our education, we only study white people stuff you know […] some of us want to go back and many of the things we have learned here sometimes do not have any direct relevance to the situation in Africa. I know the lecturers work very hard, but it would be great if they could go that extra mile and come up with scenario that we as African can also relate to. -Male African – Nigeria - Augustin*

*I may be wrong but there is this way that I feel that maybe when you are trying to put forward any idea, unless you are assertive and you […] this concern know that, to know what you are saying, there's always this tendency of trying to **maybe side-line you as probably maybe, 'This person is from Nigeria, this person is not really from this country'.** Or, 'This person, the **first language is not English',** so they may not really want to take on your idea, even when you know what you are saying, unless you are ready to assert yourself and say no. Even though English is not my first language, I know what I'm saying; I'm intelligent, yes, so I can think critically and I can express myself. ~ Black African Female, doctoral student Debbie*

Socio-cultural needs unmet

Participants identified barriers that they believed impacted upon their ability to engage fully with the rigours of university study

All three barriers or factors can be explained through relatedness and autonomy.

1. Experiencing dissatisfaction with the module and course content,
2. Having caring responsibilities Engaging in part-time employment.
3. The mainstream media narratives

Links between family responsibilities, socio-economic background ("black tax")

Effect of long Commuting

→ Lack of accommodation locally
→ Cost of accommodation
→ Need to live with family member
→ Care responsibilities

Long commuting ⟹

- Tardiness
- Uncovered syllabus
- Tiredness
- Cost of transport
- Issues with timetable

⟹ Poor academic performance and Dropout
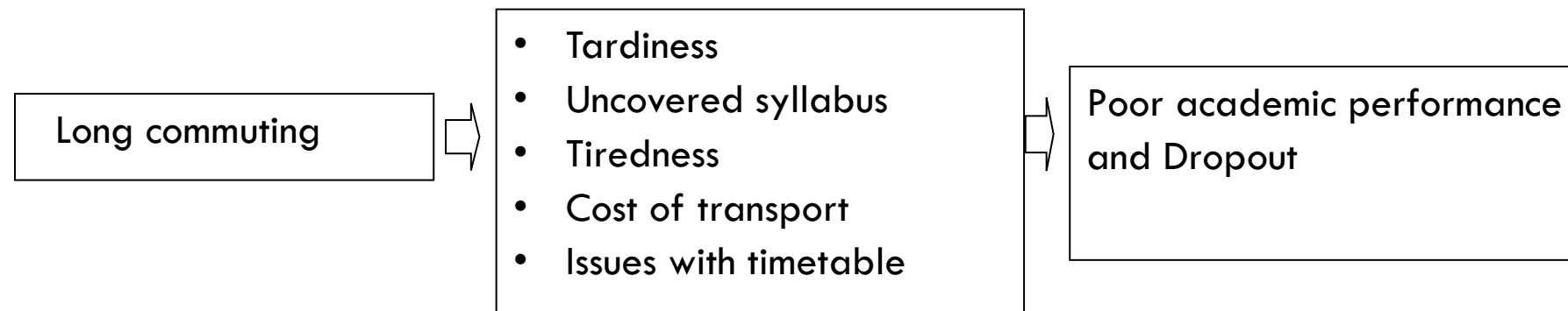
Fig. 4 Effect of long Commuting
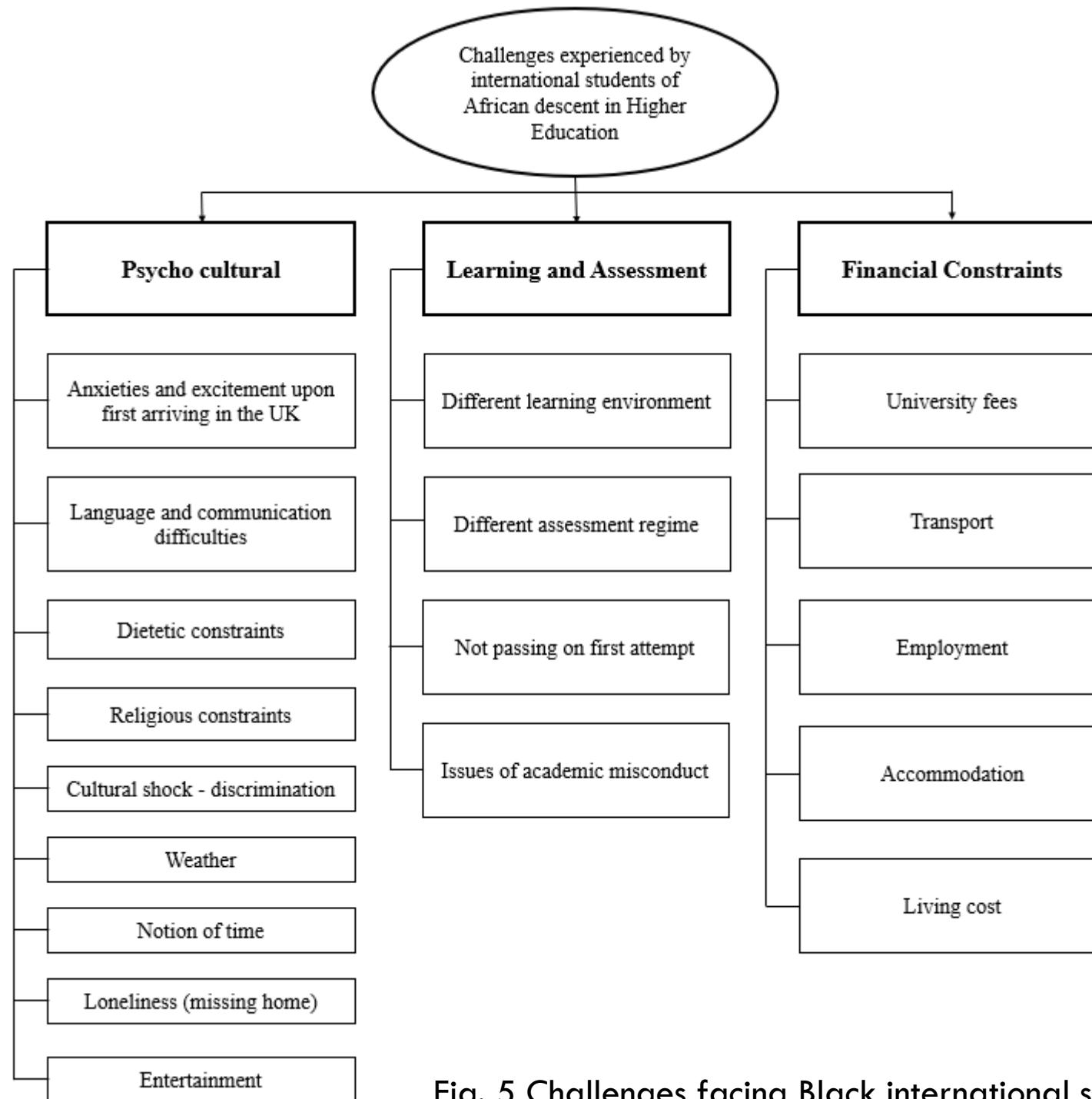
Fig. 5 Challenges facing Black international students

Job Applicants With 'Black Names' Still Less Likely to Get Interviews

Employers aren't treating identical resumes equally, new research finds.

Unemployment rate by ethnic background: UK, 2008-2022
People aged 16+, not seasonally adjusted

Ethnic minorities
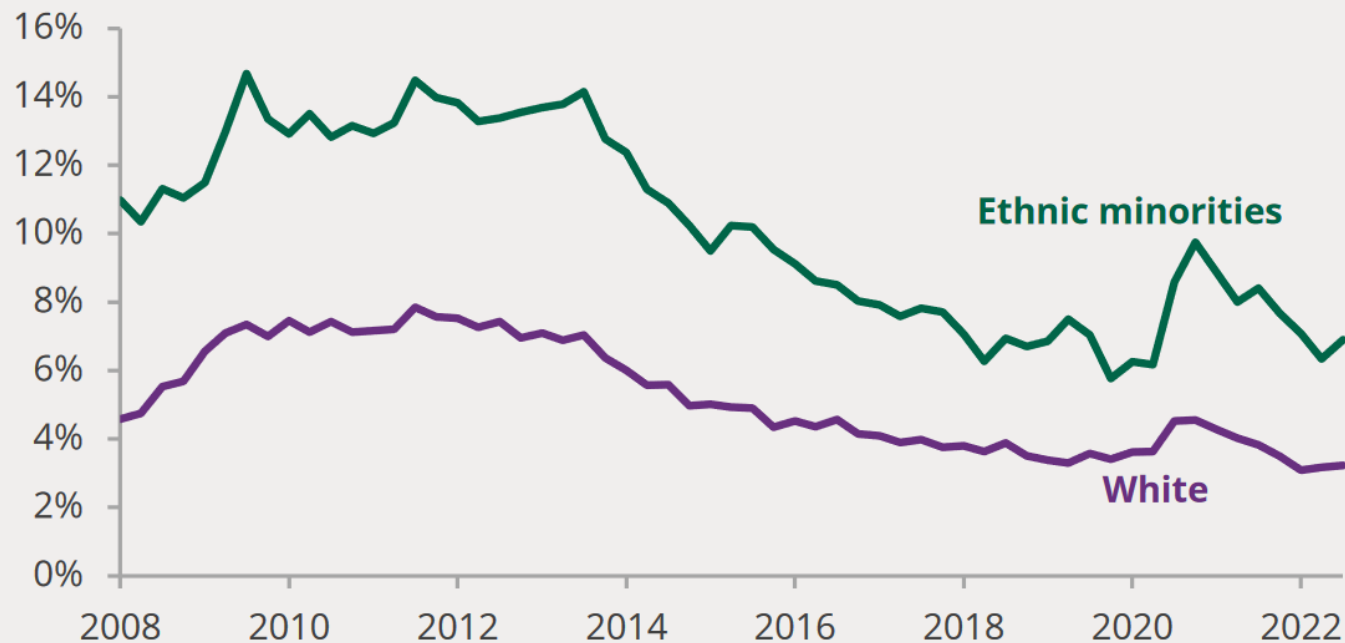
White

According to Diversity UK, **the employment rate for ethnic minorities is only 62.8% compared with an employment rate for White workers of 75.6%** – a gap of over 12 percentage points.

Source: ONS, UK labour market, August 2022
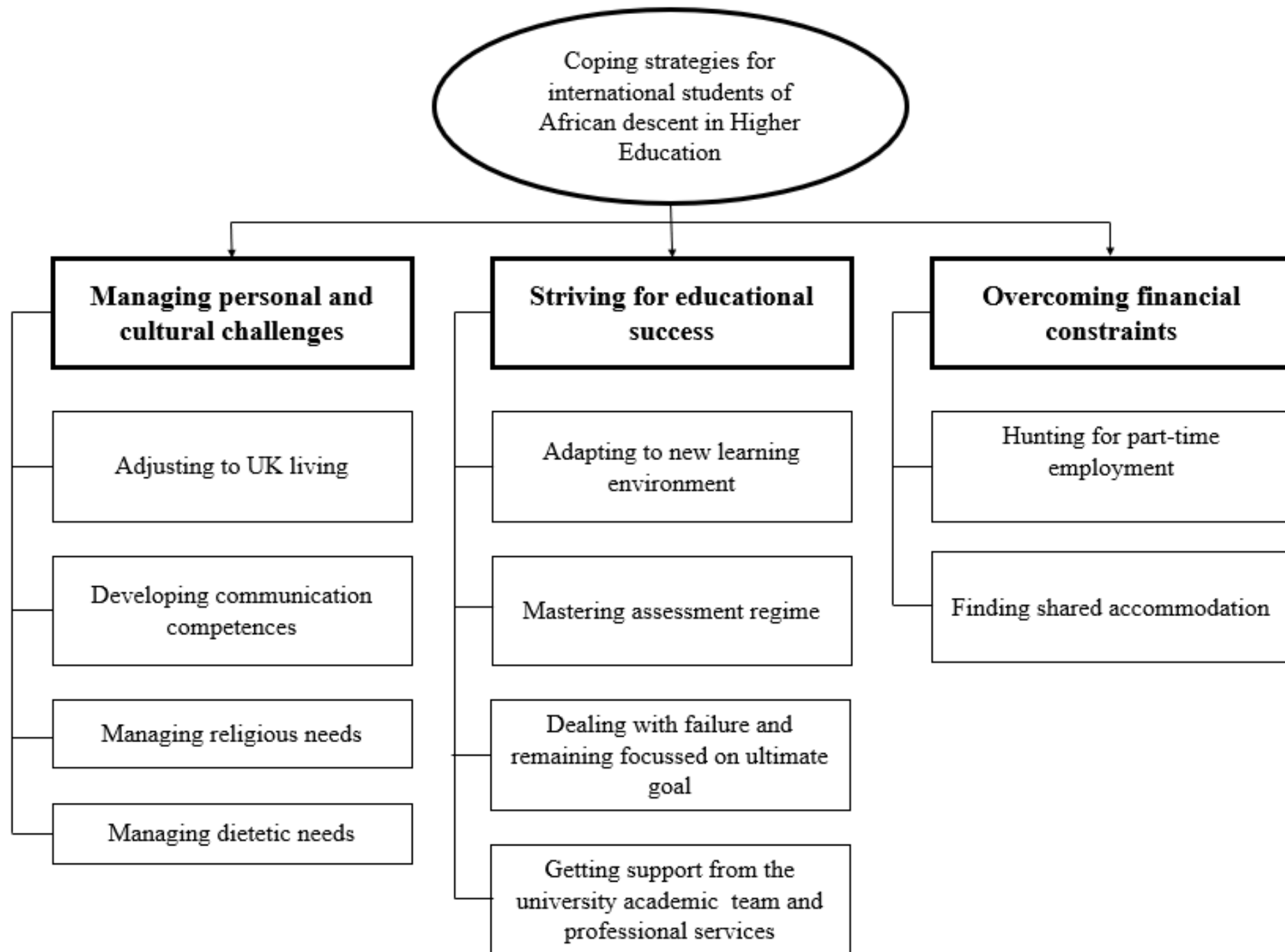
Fig 7. Coping strategies for international students.

Theoretical Framework for Resilience
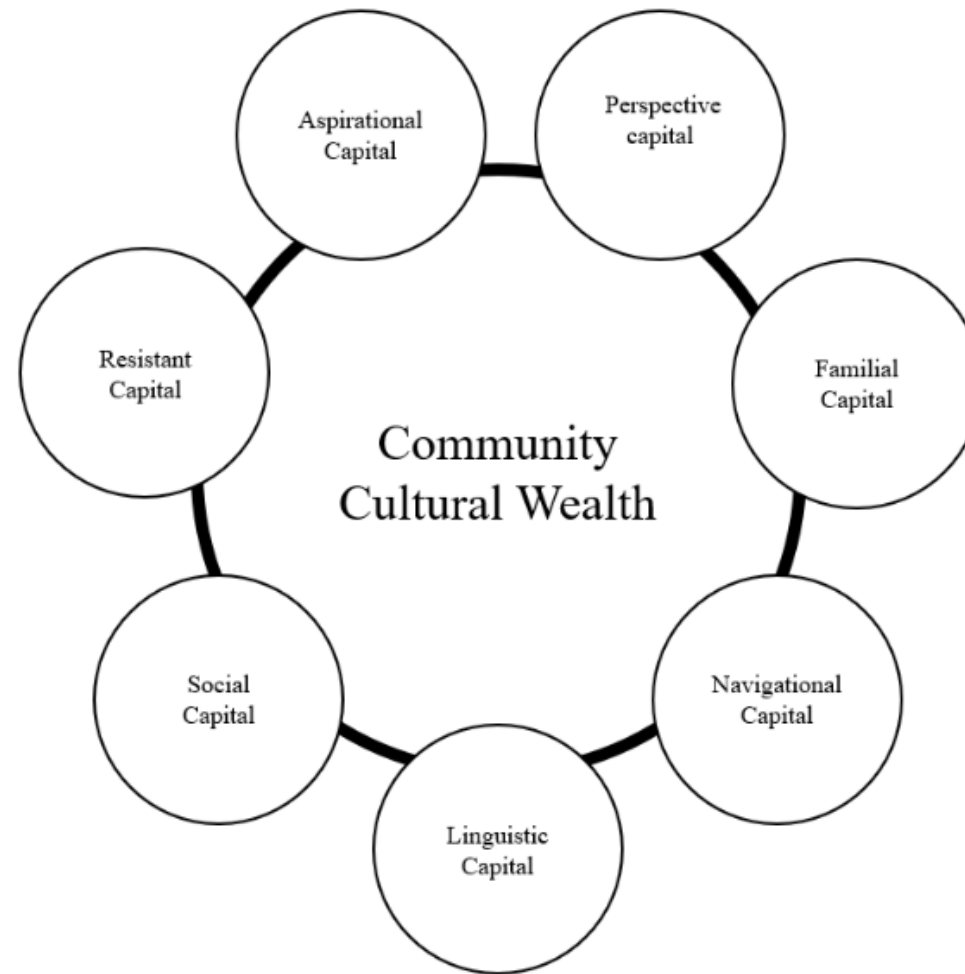
Fig 8. A model of community cultural wealth.

Social Capital
Cultural Capital
Economic Capital
Symbolic Capital

Pierre Bourdieu - Yosso
Habitus – Field – Capital

Success Stories

Professor Charles Egbu

Vice-Chancellor of Leeds Trinity University
Nigeria

Prof. Michael Opoku Agyeman

Professor of Computer Engineering in the
Technology (UON) - Ghana

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First they came ...

- First, they came for the Communists
  And I did not speak out
  Because I was not a Communist
- Then they came for the Socialists
  And I did not speak out
  Because I was not a Socialist
- Then they came for the trade unionists
  And I did not speak out
  Because I was not a trade unionist
- Then they came for the Jews
  And I did not speak out
  Because I was not a Jew

- Then they came for the Muslim people
  And I did not speak out
  Because I was not a Muslim person
- Then they came for the Disable
  And I did not speak out
  Because I was not a Disable
- Then they came for the Black people
  And I did not speak out
  Because I was not a Black person
- Then they came for me
  And there was no one left
  To speak out for me

Inspired by a 1946 post-war confessional prose by the German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller

1. Dealing with classroom and accommodation segregation
2. Increase the number of Black staff members and role models on campus
3. Decolonise your curriculum
4. Create a system for reporting discriminatory and racist behaviour
5. Work towards achieving a Race Equality Charter award
6. Provide funding for race-related research
7. Develop a support scheme for international students
8. Promote difficult conversations at all levels
9. Implement reciprocal mentoring schemes
10. Celebrate diversity

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Times Higher Education

1. Educate yourselves on race-related issues, history and culture

2. Make an effort to pronounce black students' names

3. Engage in difficult conversations with black students about life experiences and belonging

4. Dispute the idea that black students are a monolithic group

5. Promote inter-racial dialogue in student groups

6. Provide informal settings where black students can exchange ideas

7. Do not view black students as having a deficit

8. Identify and develop each student's gifts and potential, regardless of race or background

9. Consider anonymous marking

10. Ensure your curricula are inclusive and represent black experiences positively

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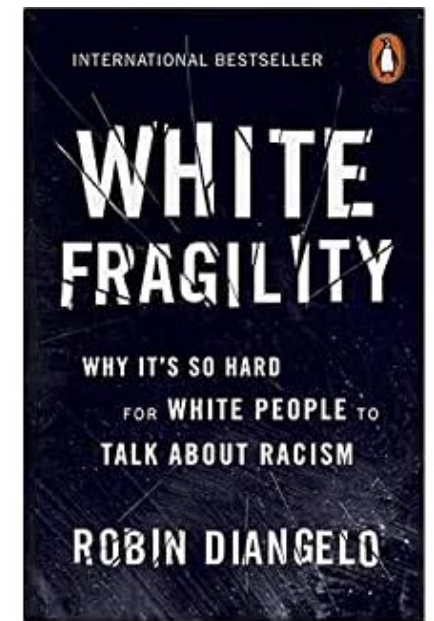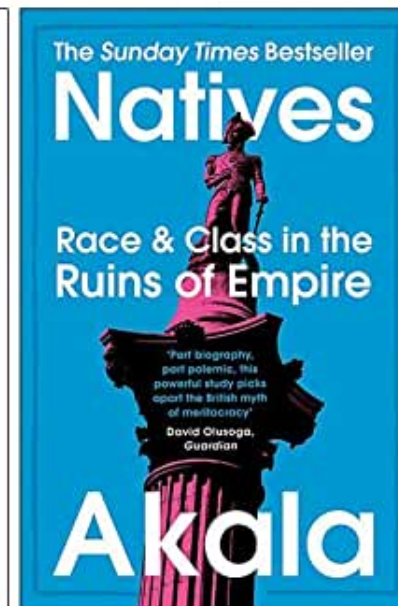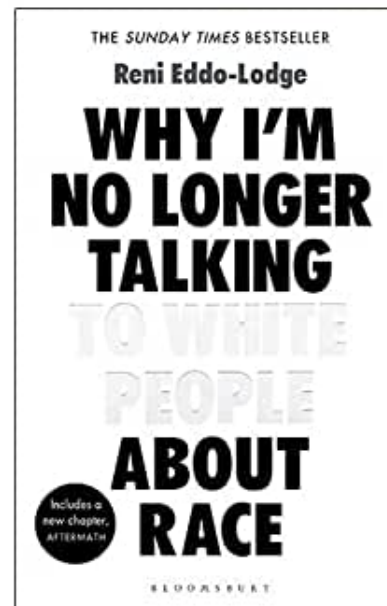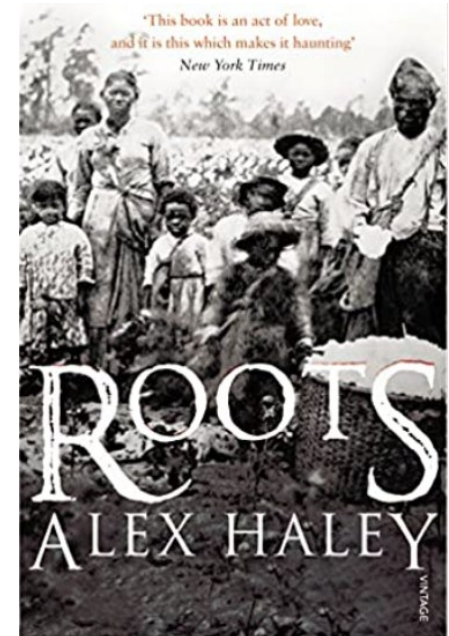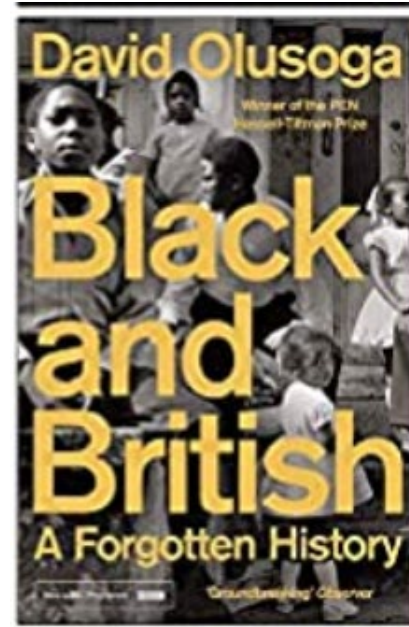
Union Black: Britain's Black Cultures and Steps to Anti-racism

- Santander Universities UK has partnered with The
- Open University and
- FutureLearn

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Thank you for listening

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