Anti-Racism at SSoA: A Call to Action

Connie Pidsley, Emma Carpenter, Jasmin Yeo, Lucie Iredale, Mimi Evans

with collaboration from Alice Grant, Julia Udall, Michael Badu, Onyi Enujuba, Rose Turner Wood, Victoria Ogoegbunam Okoye, Aisha Sillah, Aisha Khan, Aayushi Bajwala

Introduction

Co-authored in the summer of 2020, 'Anti Racism at SSoA: A Call to Action' is an open letter from students and alumni of The University of Sheffield. Written during a time where globally the collective consciousness surrounding race and class was amplified, the letter demanded action and concrete change. Using our lived experiences, we argued that the school is complicit in the structures that perpetuate systemic racism within architectural education.

The letter took two approaches, both analytical and emotional. It provided a comprehensive action plan, developed as a framework to aid the school in making critical changes. Appended to the letter were 'conversation starters', first hand experiences from Black and Asian students, illustrating the impact of these inequities on a human level.

Circa two years on from publication and the collective consciousness of 2020 appears to be waning. The 2021 Race Report concluded that structural racism is a myth in 'a tone-deaf attempt at rejecting the lived

realities of people of African descent and other ethnic minorities in the UK'. This legacy of societal inequity, compounded by the overarching bureaucracy of the educational system, has stifled progress.

In this time, the letter has also taken on many guises… "a cry", "a complaint"… "an initiative"… "(student) activism". Guises considered palatable by some and tokenistic by others. But, no matter what the letter's legacy, most importantly it has and continues to initiate conversations on race and class.

Beyond the plurality of our voices as authors and contributors, there are countless more stories to be told and voices across the diaspora to be heard.

At the time of writing we argued that our school was complicit in the structures that perpetuate systemic racism within architecture. We would still argue that this is the case, not only in Sheffield School of Architecture but throughout architectural education and practice.

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CAN YOU NAME 3 WHITE ARCHITECTS…?

NOW, CAN YOU NAME 3 BLACK ARCHITECTS…?

FINALLY, HOW MANY BLACK MEMBERS OF STAFF AT SSOA CAN YOU NAME?

UK architectural education and practice is systemically racist.

ANTI-RACISM AT SSoA: A CALL TO ACTION

DISCLAIMER

We use 'BAME' in this letter as it is a widely understood term. However, we recognise and understand the limitations of acronyms like this and the way that they homogenise the individual experiences of distinct ethnic groups, which can be inaccurate and exclusionary.

Though the issues raised in this letter pertain primarily to our experiences at SSoA, these problems and solutions could be applied to other institutions and the wider profession.

The main body of this letter has been written by a group of third year students with different lived experiences regarding race and economics. We have tried to be as reflective as possible during the writing process but understand that there may still be an unintentional bias.

We welcome any feedback or comments on the handling of issues raised in this letter, and hope that it can bring attention to new and existing conversations.

To the Department, Staff, and Students of the Sheffield School of Architecture,

In the wake of George Floyd's murder, the resulting global Black Lives Matter protests, and general amplification of consciousness surrounding race and class, we, the undersigned, argue that our school has been and remains complicit in the structures that perpetuate systemic racism within architecture.

We demand immediate action and concrete change.

Systemic racism manifests from the existing hierarchies within our society that maintain white hegemony. These are especially rife within higher education and the architectural profession. Architecture is an innately holistic discipline, tasked with catering to the needs of all peoples and communities around the world. Therefore, it is critical to ensure that the individuals who take it upon themselves to contribute to the profession, reflect the diversity of the society that they serve.

To achieve this, we are demanding a radical shift in representation, institutional structures and pedagogy; one that accepts the political and social importance of architecture.

SSoA: A 'SOCIAL' SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE?

The current pedagogy at SSoA fosters an environment where discourse surrounding gender equality and feminism is supported and engrained across the curriculum.

But where has race been in this narrative?

Conversations about race have been consistently minimised, resulting in the propagation of largely Eurocentric and imperialist perspectives. In this critical moment, we cannot stand by and ignore this opportunity to re-evaluate our priorities and take responsibility.

By openly accepting accountability for this outdated pedagogy and initiating conversations about race, we can push for real change in the way that the school operates, to nurture and empower BAME students and staff.

For Sheffield School of Architecture to be the 'social' school of architecture that it claims to be, it needs to become an actively anti-racist institution.

We must examine our collective and individual experiences to allow for open and honest conversations.

THE ISSUES

The AJ Race & Diversity Survey 2020 found that 33% of BAME Architects and 17% of white architects believe that racism in the profession is widespread. This figure is worse for Black architects with 43% reporting racism as 'widely prevalent'.[1] These disgraceful figures are sustained by the conscious lack of conversation at every level of architectural education regarding race.

We must not be scared of the difficult conversations. It is not enough to listen to the experiences of BAME staff and students, and expect them to carry the burden of emotional labour. There is no excuse.

It is the responsibility of the entire SSoA community, regardless of race, to be actively anti-racist. We all have to challenge instances of racism, whether these are blatant or covertly hidden within microaggressions or biases that impact admissions.

Architecture remains a privileged profession, with economic barriers littered from undergraduate study through to qualifying as an architect. These barriers stifle accessibility and exclude BAME talent from architectural spheres. This is symptomatic of issues within a wider

"TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU THINK THERE IS RACISM IN YOUR PROFESSION?"

90% of BAME respondents think that there is some or widespread racism in the profession

- 33% - 'It's widespread.'
- 56% - 'There is some.'
- 9% - 'There is little.'
- 2% - 'There is none.'
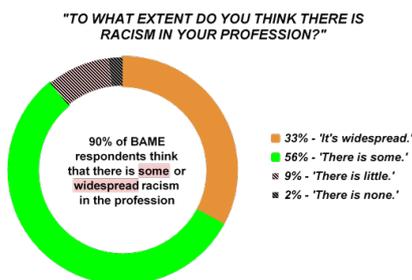
Illustration authors, based on data from The AJ Race & Diversity Survey 2020.

1   Richard Waite, 'Architecture is systemically racist. So, what is the profession going to do about it?', *Architects Journal*, 2020, https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/architecture-is-systemically-racist-so-what-is-the-profession-going-to-do-about-it/10047603.article [accessed 24 July 2020]

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professional context, where 90% of jobs in the creative economy are done by people in 'more advantaged socioeconomic groups', compared to 66% in the wider economy.[2] There is an assumption of affluence applied to students in architectural education, which creates an alienating environment for those who don't meet the criteria.

This is an issue that disproportionately affects BAME students and we cannot address issues of racial inequality without addressing economic inequality simultaneously.

A more economically diverse student and staff body feeds back into a more socially conscious curriculum and school ethos. The curriculum currently allows students to enter into practice with an education that subconsciously encourages a creative saviour complex. A lack of working-class representation within the school is reflected in projects set on 'deprived' sites, highlighting class divides. Additionally, there is an absence of confident, open discussion surrounding socio-political issues, which impacts the intellectual rigour of students' work and the communities they are designing for. This may stem from a desire for tutors to remain impartial, and while impartiality is important for giving students the space to form their own ideas, many feel uninformed in initiating these more nuanced conversations.

Architecture taught predominantly from the Western perspective of the old modernist masters, whitewashes the history of the built environment.

How can we expect to create equitable, anti-racist cities if we solely rely on a single homogenous group to impose their vision?

The lack of visible BAME role models in the school, as well as the profession, results in feelings of otherness among BAME students. As a school of architecture, we have to actively recognise this and instigate a shift in pedagogy that celebrates counterparts to the 'modern master' from elsewhere in the world. A diversified curriculum needs to go further than humanities lectures. This needs to be integrated into 'studio culture'.

We must acknowledge the variations in the experience of different ethnic groups. When asked in the AJ Race and Diversity survey 2020 whether 'being from a BAME background can create barriers to career progression in the architecture industry', 44% of BAME respondents strongly agreed, whereas this increased to 51% when assessing solely Black responses.

This trend is seen all the way throughout the survey and highlights the increased inequalities that Black African and Caribbean Architects specifically experience in the architectural sphere. This is not to say that all other minority ethnic groups don't experience instances of discrimination and racism, but we cannot ignore that certain ethnic groups, primarily

2   Mayor of London and others, *Supporting Diversity Handbook* (London: Mayor of London, 2019), p.23.

of Black origin, experience this to a greater degree. Additionally, these nuances extend to the individual realities of international students within the school which again should not be homogeneously grouped. The lived experiences of all BAME architects are not identical.

It is imperative that data collection reflects and responds to this reality

Systemic racism, economic barriers, a whitewashed curriculum and a lack of representative role models are all factors that perpetuate phenomena such as imposter syndrome and attainment gaps. There must be an understanding of emotional drain and trauma that these issues inflict upon BAME students and staff.

DEMANDED ACTION:

In an attempt to address these issues, we have created a by no means exhaustive action plan, to ensure SSoA commits to being actively anti-racist in future academic year.

For the full letter, including the table of demanded action which covers 1. Representation & Diversity, 2. Structural Change and 3. Equalising Pedagogy, please see https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cRMQPFOjpw7UTD5RmH-ywWiNduAsB4Bf/view

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

As the students behind the writing of this letter we value our time at SSoA and are grateful for all that the school has taught us. However, this fondness does not blind us to the need for progress. We believe that the School of Architecture is in the unique position that it can instigate change, on a local level, without the need to rely on instruction from the wider university. SSoA should be the example for every department within the university and for the 'Architecture School' as a typology. As it stands the school is paving the way on a multitude of fronts, however, there is more work to be done. We have to pave the way in ending systemic racism in architecture. There is no excuse.

Thank you to the staff and students both inside and outside of SSoA who have empowered and supported us in the writing of this letter.

Signed by the Students and Alumni of SSoA, and those in solidarity.

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STARTING CONVERSATIONS ON RACE AND CLASS AT SSOA WITH:

SINK OR SWIM: A BA IN ARCHITECTURE, A PART-TIME JOB AND COVID-19

A BLACK MUSLIM EXPERIENCE

REPRESENTATION AS A POC SSOA GRADUATE

STRONG BLACK ARCHITECTS

A POC EXPERIENCE AT SSOA

SINK OR SWIM: A BA IN ARCHITECTURE, A PART-TIME JOB AND COVID-19

EMMA CARPENTER

Architecture is renowned for being a demanding course of study at university, challenging no matter who you are. It is amplified further when you aren't a white, middle-class cisgender male. I am a working-class BME woman who has worked part-time alongside my studies for the last five years. As a Black student in the UK, it is expected of you to work twice as hard as your white peers for a shot at the same opportunity. The outbreak of COVID-19 classed me as a 'key' worker during my final year, exposing more socio-economic discrepancies than before.[3]

3   The real 'key' workers in my opinion are the NHS staff, healthcare and transport workers.

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field:

a free journal for architecture

Like many with my background, I began working part-time as soon as I turned sixteen. However, with my sights set on studying architecture and the high demands of my A-Level subjects, it became increasingly difficult to study and work in tandem. Under pressure from my teachers, I quit my job to focus solely on my studies. I intended on meeting the requirements for my offers at Bath or Cambridge (the two leading courses outside of London at the time) but I ended up going through clearing. I was lucky to be given a place on the course but I wasn't introduced to the financial aid of the Stephen Lawrence Scholarship during my application, something that could have prevented the need for me to write this piece. The disparity between the level of information I received as a clearing student and my non-clearing coursemates became apparent when the material list was released and I realised the true cost of the course. The lack of a job during my first year at university left me arriving back home with £2 left in my overdraft. Since then, I have held a dual-store contract alongside my studies through to graduation. My university recommended working no more than 16 hours a week - my contract was 12. Despite working "less", the job took more than 12 hours out of my week. Considering travel, getting ready, etc. I calculated that I had 18-21 fewer hours to spend on my degree than my non-working coursemates. The disparity led to difficulty completing my studies to the standard I had set myself and a sense of alienation in studio culture and social life, crucial to the "uni experience".

While many university students work part-time, the combination of a job and an architecture degree is less common. Many staff will discourage students working alongside an architectural degree, but in a climate focused on promoting equality in the course, it must become accepted that some students need jobs to stay afloat. Although I had coursemates with jobs, I was undoubtedly one of if not the only student that needed her earnings to live. The course averaged at eighteen contact hours a week with the expectation that the ratio of hours taught to independent study was 1:3. Thus, an additional fifty-four hours a week combined with eighteen at work meant I had a ninety-hour week (seven thirteen-hour days). It was important to me not to work all-nighters on my coursework, to maintain the minimum requirement for "self-care". I had little time left to take care of my mental wellbeing and lead an active social life.

Other students and I have found that the staff reaction to students working during their degree is generally not encouraging. If anything, it is the opposite. Out of all of my tutors throughout my undergraduate, I only told two about my job. Not because they made me feel comfortable enough that I could open up to them, but because I thought I needed to explain why I was falling behind the standard of my peers. I was afraid that they wouldn't see me as hard-working when, in reality, it's the only trait for which I give myself credit. A tutor told me that they were in the same position at my age but that they were given an ultimatum: work or focus on the course. They stopped working. They told me they'd monitor me in case

they would have to apply the same ultimatum. Although it was said with the intention of being encouraging, it did little to relieve me of stress. This comment elevated the pressure I already felt to attain the same standard as my peers: I was not in a position to lose my job; I didn't have the luxury of quitting. My "inconvenient" job kept my head above the water throughout my degree. Sink or Swim. My only option was to work harder than I ever had and to prove to my tutor that I could do it, I could graduate with a job on the side.

With four months until graduation, the country went into lockdown and I moved back home to spend it with my family. Lockdown happened just as we were beginning the most crucial design phase of our final project – when we needed our tutors the most. The realisation that I was now an 'essential' worker did little to calm my nerves – why did I have to work in one of the 'essential' sectors? Up until then, I had negotiated my shifts so that they would be as convenient as possible. Still, I found myself being given random shifts throughout the week that were interfering with lectures and tutorials. Luckily, my tutor agreed to timetable my tutorials around my shifts so that I would lose the least contact time possible.

I was "lucky" because I knew of tutors that would not do the same. I was no longer in control of my work schedule, as a dual-store student on the minimum contract was only useful to cover for those who had to shield. The lack of regular shifts worsened my stress as I knew it directly affected my studio partner, my tutor and their daily lives. Previous feelings of being below-average and less talented were added to by the sense of causing inconvenience to my uni peers. My small role in helping to feed the nation during lockdown is something I'll always be proud of, but this pride is dwarfed by the shame and estrangement I have consistently felt for having to work.

When I would tell coursemates I had to work; they would always say 'how do you do it? I could never do both'. I always replied that it's easy to stay motivated when there isn't an alternative. When the only other option is to drop out because you cannot fund your degree, you keep going. If I have taken anything away from working with my degree, it is that I am grateful to be employed and that I am more durable than I give myself credit for. It is possible to graduate with a BA in Architecture from a leading university while working part-time, if I can do it, anybody can. The hardest part is knowing your potential but accepting being underestimated because you can't afford to prove it.

My experience showed me significant inequalities with the architectural education system. Below are examples where a part-time job interferes with a standard architecture degree. These should be seen as suggestions of how architectural education can be improved to prevent these situations:

STUDY VISITS

Although the department emphasises that some visits are non-compulsory and that missing them does not negatively impact your work, they remain enriching opportunities that are otherwise unattainable. These visits are accessible to low-income students only if they can afford to save money from their paycheck and are approved for time off.

Compulsory study visits are attendable at best if a student can use their limited holiday balance, although in most cases approval only comes for unpaid time off. To mitigate the drop in pay, students will have to make up the hours lost, affecting their study time later on.

Day-visits on university time may also coincide with evening shifts, meaning the student may have to leave early (thus missing out) or carrying their uniform around with them all day. Neither option is ideal but unless a colleague can swap shifts, it is one or the other. Taking extra time to return to site alone is not only dangerous, but leaves less time for coursework.

"SPARE" TIME

Time taken up by work is time removed from independent study and a social life. There is a sense of responsibility to use spare time wisely and with the duress of the architecture degree, spare time is utterly engulfed by coursework. The "late hours" way of working, so prevalent in architecture and often encouraged by tutors (despite staff pleas not to), is more tempting to a student who loses close to twenty hours a week. However, the dilemma of the 'good' working-class student is whether to work late, or to work well. Opting to work well removes any remaining 'downtime', vital for proper mental health.

Imposter Syndrome, or an internalised feeling of being below average, is not rare in architecture. It is almost normalised but never spoken about publicly. Many struggle with self-doubt, and this is worsened for working students. This self-doubt leads to the conviction that such students are always catching up, rushing, to keep up the appearance of being a 'regular' student. Students will spend every hour outside of work and sleep on the coursework only to believe it is never enough to satisfy staff.

There also exists the argument by students dedicated to playing a sport, engaged in the creative arts or with other non-uni commitments that the issues in this piece are not exclusive to working-class students. I would argue that these extra-curricular activities are a choice, perhaps the degree is the side-project, and it is not a matter of sink or swim as it is for low-income students. Students with extracurricular commitments often

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receive subsidised travel and food, and may be given more leniency by departments whereas many working students barely qualify for a bursary.

MATERIALS AND SOFTWARE

A degree in architecture requires access to many softwares, some of which are free to students and others which are not. To ensure availability of all softwares to all students, the university has a limited array of computers with full access to these softwares available until 9pm. However, as a working student, the access hours do not always coincide neatly with shifts. Much of the time spent on coursework happens in the later hours of the evenings, contrary to the recommendations of staff. Thus, students unable to access the uni computers must find ways of funding their subscriptions to essential softwares – another expenditure reliant on the job, and another reason students need to work.

As for the materials and printing essential to the course, the credit supplied to students by the department barely lasts the academic year – especially when some funds intended for the final year credit are redirected to a compulsory study visit. Portfolio and model costs are added to the list of unavoidable course-related expenditures, obviously financed by jobs, which tutors would prefer us not to have, for working-class students. The assumption of affluence in architecture is detrimental for students wholly self-reliant to finance their degrees. Truly egalitarian departments would recognise this issue, and introduce course funding which is reflective of students' backgrounds as well as subscriptions to softwares which students can access at home.

EVENTS

Outside of the course, the department's society runs lectures by well-known architects throughout the year. These are a great opportunity for students to spend an hour away from their coursework to learn about the profession whilst also networking. Such lectures and other events should be available to all students, but when they fall at the same time as a shift at work, suddenly these students are excluded. It is important to understand that a fixed-contract cannot easily be manipulated to suit each social event in a student's life. If societies would rotate the days these lectures were available, or at least record them for independent viewing, those in attendance could be more diverse and representative.

In the process of applying for my Part 1 placement, I became aware of another instance where a part-time job will impede low-income students further. Due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus and its implications on the job market, many practices in a position to hire Part 1s have large

projects incoming. Thus, they need to hire a suitable candidate as soon as possible. Many fixed contract part-time jobs have a notice period that must be observed. In my case, I need to give my employer one months' notice. Any practice desperate to hire will overlook the applications of working students as their availability will not fit theirs, placing them at a greater disadvantage than their peers. There also exists the fear that employers reviewing CVs similar to mine will think "this person could not complete their degree giving it their full attention. They are distracted by a job and money. This isn't someone I want to employ' instead of 'this person has good time-management and works very hard". I hope to be proven wrong.

A BLACK MUSLIM EXPERIENCE

AISHA SILLAH

DISCLAIMER: This piece is simply to share my experiences to strengthen our demand for change. It is in no way an attack on anyone referenced. My aim is to start a conversation moving towards a more equitable and inclusive future at SSoA.

The need for change at SSoA and in architectural education extends beyond the curriculum. There are social aspects within SSoA which contribute to the often-exclusionary atmosphere of the university experience. The following text consists of my experiences at SSoA where I feel work can be done to include people of every ethnicity, religion and culture.

The SUAS Winter Ball is a celebration for all students at the SSoA, but this cannot be achieved unless every attendee is equally accommodated for. As with many events, a survey was sent out for dietary requirements for which I outlined 'halal food only'. At the event, there was no confirmation of the food being halal, and even more alarming only water was served as an alternative to the wine drinks packages awarded to each table of guests. Water should not be the halal version of wine, especially when non-drinkers are expected to pay the same ticket prices as drinkers.

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Halal options should have been made unambiguously available to Muslim students. Why ask for dietary requirements if there is no intention to recognise them? Why pay to be singled out? It is enough to stop students like myself from attending such events in the future.

Events within the school should be advertised with the intention of being accessible to all. Exclusive advertising methods have previously been employed (in emails and posters) by focusing the event on the consumption of alcohol. The issue here is not its consumption but instead the latent message to non-drinking students that they are already unwelcome. This alcohol-centralised culture extends into the profession through networking events or project discussions at pubs, leading to a loss of opportunities for some students and employees who simply don't share the same values. For a discipline and a profession that so strongly advocates for societal progressions, it is a shame that inclusivity is often overlooked.

While the university has done well to include prayer rooms in most of the buildings, the Arts Tower fails in this regard. There is said to be a 'prayer room' which I tried to use to pray until I found it was turned into a working space for students, and later a staff office. If a respected and distinct place for prayer can exist in other buildings, why not in the Arts Tower? Especially considering the significant amount of time students are expected to spend there.

During Ramadan, I was invited by one of my peers to go for lunch, and had to tell them I could not because I was fasting. Their response to this was, "Oh so you're one of the fasters." This microaggression, intentional or not, showed me just how the exclusionary environment at SSoA may contribute to the unfortunate words and actions of some of its students. Students who will graduate and eventually have to work with or for clients who may be different to themselves.

QUARANTINE

I am not unique in suggesting that the global pandemic of COVID-19 has revealed a number of inequalities in all areas of society. Architecture has always been and continues to be a time, resource and labour-intensive course, typically leaving those with less behind. Its effects were similarly amplified during quarantine.

Students like myself who were quarantined in council flats with extended family members, would simply not have the space or facilities to carry out work to the expected quality. In my case, living in a two-bed flat with four other family members (one of whom was pregnant) and an extremely weak internet connection meant time, space and concentration were all

compromised. This resulted in doing work in a noisy room on the floor which takes a toll on physical health, and is just embarrassing during tutorials.

This struggle alongside fasting in the month of Ramadan meant realistically less time could be given to work while still having to observe religious duties of learning, praying, and cooking for Iftaar as a family. I tried to explain these difficulties to a tutor, but I was cut short with "You won't get an extension, Ramadan is just not eating."

Again, this is a microaggression, intentional or not. My reaction in my head was "unless you are a fasting Muslim, you are in no position to tell me what Ramadan consists of." I had to explain my situation to the head of year and later speak to this tutor again who finally understood my situation.

An extension for most students was very helpful but may not have proven enough when measured in conjunction with individual circumstances. Despite a safety net policy for all, unique circumstances should be recognised and mitigated against accordingly during marking rather than keeping the same standard across the board.

It is a question of equity or equality in such scenarios because yes, we all experienced COVID-19 in an unprecedented way together, but privilege meant we all had different levels of difficulties to battle through during quarantine. Some students had designated spaces in workable environments with access to necessary facilities, while others had output quality and productivity heavily compromised. How then is it fair for such students to be marked to the same standard? When such differences are not recognised during marking it negatively affects Muslim and economically disadvantaged students, and possibly strengthens the notion of wealthier students progressing further into the degree, thereby keeping the profession elite, white and aloof of everyone else for whom architecture is supposed to be.

As a Race Equality Champion for the university, it has been disappointing to see how racism effortlessly manifests itself into our university environment as a response to our own actions. This position, alongside my experience as a Black Muslim student in architecture, has made it immensely necessary to facilitate such discussions for a more inclusive school. I hope that by addressing these issues of discrimination, we can relish and thrive in a future where architecture is indeed representative of the very people for whom we create solutions.

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REPRESENTATION AS A POC SSOA GRADUATE

AISHA KHAN

Over the recent years, representation of non-white ethnicities has become a more discussed topic in all fields – whether this discussion has led to action is still in question. However, the architectural industry is once again, behind. Sheffield School of Architecture has a reputation as the 'social' school of architecture in the UK, yet a massive underrepresentation of BAME (although the notion of lumping all non-white ethnicities as one group is counterproductive) students and tutors is clear.

One of the topics explored in this publication is the whitewashing of architectural education – alongside disregarding legitimate masters of architecture, this once again brings up the topic of representation. As a student, you are constantly trying to see yourself where you want to be – can you see yourself in the architects we learn about? Can you see yourself in the staff teaching it to us? Can you see yourself in design media?
Can you see yourself in the people you're applying to work for? Since graduating, I have felt an overwhelming disappointment when applying for jobs. Every firm's 'our people' page holds inevitable disappointment, when you see page after page of middle-aged white men smiling at the camera. I've realised I have started excitedly telling my parents when I see a woman of colour on a website, yet every firm is an 'equal opportunities employer.' The definition of 'equal opportunity employer' is an employer who 'agrees not to discriminate against any employee or job applicant because of race, colour, religion, national origin, sex, physical or mental disability, or age.' So why is it that if there is no discrimination, we still struggle to see people of colour where we want to be? Agreeing to 'not discriminate' is the bare minimum. When systemic racism exists, it is not enough just to 'not discriminate.'

It is clear that the place to see change manifested into an industry is through education, yet if people of colour are underrepresented at each stage of (a very long) architectural education, this cannot change. The 2018/19 RIBA Education Statistics shows a clear drop in the number of 'minority ethnicity' students from the start of Part 1 to the end of Part 3. Clearly something is wrong with this educational model if it is

disproportionately affecting minority ethnicities. Maybe that's why the lack of people like me in the industry seems worse since graduating. Sheffield seems to have a diverse (to an extent) cohort but graduating has shown me that university is a bubble. So, if we are a diverse student body, why are less women and minority ethnicities finishing architectural education? (only 10% of Part 3 architects qualifying in 2016/17 were not white). I do not believe that representation within the student body is the biggest problem, it is the education itself.

Architecture is unlike most courses, with a very long period before qualification, which in itself causes a lot of problems. We all know that race, class and gender are intrinsically linked and the length of architectural education holds clear drawbacks for women and students from a working-class background, therefore favouring middle-class white males. The amount of time spent at university, with or without student loans, is too long. Clearly this is a bigger issue than something SSoA can fix alone but it is a valid place to start.

When I'm complaining to my housemates about the bleakness of only seeing middle aged white men on the websites of architectural firms, they joke that that's what my group of course mates will look like when we are older. As young people we have a duty to make changes we want to see and apply to work for people that we believe are making positive change, but as a 2020 graduate I am in the last place to be picky. Maybe in a different economic climate, we would be freer to apply to work in diverse workplace environments but the fact is that we don't have the power or choice to work for places that promote and champion minority ethnicities, even if we can still work for 'equal opportunities employers.'

As a South Asian woman, seeing Zaha Hadid at the top of the field for years has played a huge role in feeling represented in architecture. However, off the top of my head I couldn't name many South Asian architects, male or female, whom I regularly see in the media. I can't help but feel as though the industry assumes that all South Asians are represented because of one person. This is the same feeling as wondering if your achievements are just to 'tick a box', a feeling that I'm sure many BAME students can relate to.

So, what can we do?

Ordinarily, as people, we have power through our choices, where we choose to study, or whom we choose to work for, but again, as young people in this current climate, our choices are limited and it is easy to feel quite helpless. Therefore, change needs to happen within our institutions. This publication outlines long- and short-term changes to be made within SSoA, of which I would like to emphasise the importance of increasing representation of BAME staff and students. As much as we can lobby for

change within the institution, as students and alumni, one thing we can do is make ourselves aware.

I have found that starting conversations surrounding race with my (mostly white) course mates can often have me dismissed, or that there is a mentality to agree that there is a problem but then dismiss it because 'there's nothing we can do.' This attitude perpetuates the issue of feeling 'othered.' The only way people can become aware is if we force this conversation to happen, especially with our classmates.

Address the underrepresentation of BAME tutors, students and qualified architects, and reach out to other students who also feel underrepresented. Understand what is happening within the industry, even reading the RIBA Education Statistics can be eye opening. In recent months, I have found conversation with other minorities to be the best way to understand what is happening around us, listening to personal experience. So have the difficult conversations with the people around you and make yourself aware of the experiences of your peers and how that might differ to yours. Most importantly, we must all identify our privilege, whether that be race, class or gender, because checking our privilege is the first step in being able to use it to help.
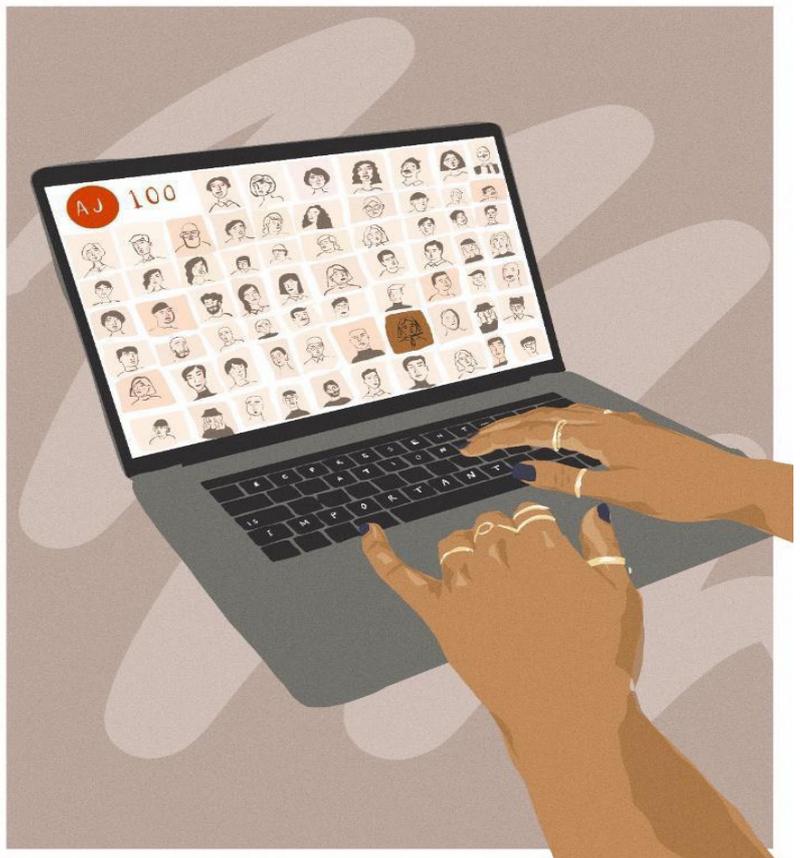
Illustration Aisha Kahn 2020

Anti-Racism at SSoA: A Call to Action Connie Pidsley, Emma Carpenter, Jasmin Yeo, Lucie Iredale, Mimi Evans

STRONG BLACK ARCHITECTS: THE FACADE OF BLACK STRENGTH IN THE FACE OF A STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Anonymous

Mental health has become somewhat of a hot topic in recent years, with many individuals coming forward to express their need for more support and less stigmatisation, an admirable and just cause. And while mental health awareness is something that I think is important, I couldn't, and to a degree still can't help but see it as something that isn't for me, even during a critical year of unrest that has exacerbated mental health issues universally. Because you see, Black people, don't do mental health…

There is evidence to suggest that people from a BAME background are more likely to suffer from a mental health problem, with African-Caribbean people like myself seven times more likely to experience psychosis than White British people. But still; mental illness…?

"Wi nuh av dat."

Simply because, for Black people, it's often not an option.

Growing up in a predominantly white neighbourhood, it became apparent that I would have to work twice as hard as my white counterparts to be valued. I was given a 'white' name to avoid biases when submitting job applications; frightened by society's propagation of Black stereotypes portraying us as ignorant, stupid and useless; given funny looks and comments from neighbours and shop clerks; all of which suggested that I would never be accepted as worthy or good.

"Wen yuh leave dis yah yard yuh a representin di faamli."

As an anxious young Black person, you do everything in your power to evade these stereotypes to avoid rejection, or worse, humiliation from your white counterparts; an experience I am all too familiar with.

At school, where some of my white peers had never interacted with a Black person one on one, I became the unofficial representative for Black people

everywhere. I would have to be exceptional before I could shed my token status. The image of 'strong Black men and women' therefore, is a complex one. It's an image that I and many other Black people in my life are forced to adopt simply to live. Strength means hiding any semblance of weakness, thickening your skin and hiding parts of yourself to appear palatable. Acceptable. Assimilated. You ignore your mental and physical discomfort, because you know from experience that if you speak out, your pain will not be taken seriously, or may be used to silence you.

How fitting then, that I would take interest in a discipline like architecture, where despite 1 in 4 students seeking treatment from psychological services in 2016, mental health is expected to take a backseat to your coursework.

While recent efforts have been made to encourage students to adopt a healthy work life balance at SSoA, like numerous schools of architecture across the country and the world, a long-hours culture persists. Its essence taints the comments and suggestions of tutors, implying that you should work over the weekend, during the evening after studio, perhaps during the time that you require for other activities such as a part time job, family commitments or self-care. This leads students to feeling out of their depth. As a consequence, they work long hours, running in circles trying to understand what they did wrong and how to fix it, sometimes to no avail. This culture of self-neglect extends to the staff of our institution, who overwork themselves as much as the students. As students we respect and appreciate our staff, which unfortunately leads to weakened pastoral care where students are:

1. Hesitant to ask for help to avoid adding to staff workloads

2. Unable to get the help they really need.

Working long hours lulled me into a cycle of neglecting my mental and physical health during crunch time. My aspirations for success were again tinged with anxiety about being ignorant or incapable; the same imposter syndrome that ran deep through my aforementioned experiences in education.

<div align="right">"Eediat gyal."</div>

My imposter syndrome was most definitely exacerbated by a lack of Black representation in the wider profession, both inside and outside the school. I believe the definition of affluence extends far beyond a tax bracket. It's who you know, the experiences you've had, the opportunities you are given and the confidence that is instilled in you to take them. I would look at practice websites and fear that I wouldn't fit in and would have to deal with the same anxiety inducing microaggressions and racism I dealt with since

early childhood. My Black self-esteem was low, and it wasn't until later on, arguably too late, that I finally asked for some kind of support.

"Yuh cyaan carry on wi dis nansense."

The infrastructure surrounding pastoral care at SSoA is fundamentally broken. This unfortunate reality left me feeling lost at times; especially where my anxieties overlapped with my blackness.

After a particularly uncomfortable experience with racial slurs among other microaggressions, I didn't know who to turn to. I chose to speak with my head of year, who I knew was already stretched for time, but I was unsure of what they could do for me and what the consequences of raising my voice would be in such a tight-knit school. I considered resolving the incident on my own terms, but was dissuaded after speaking with a very empathetic Black student studying at the University of Edinburgh who had been through a similar experience.

Upon reflection, I regret the way that the situation was put to rest. Ultimately it was left up to me to decide how my course mate should be disciplined. My options were to take it to the university (an elusive process that I feared would create tension on such a relatively small course), deal with it myself or I could leave it be. I chose to take a middle ground, using my head of year as a mediator as I teased out an apology and attempted to educate said course mate. While I am still appreciative of the apology, I worry about pressure on BAME students to lead the way in correcting the lapses in judgement that often go unchecked among the staff and student cohort; lapses protected by a colonised and unrepresentative curriculum and studio culture.

At a university level, when accessing psychological services, I struggled to find support for stress related to my blackness as well. The counsellors who I spoke to, all of whom were white, were often unable to support me when talking about the imposter syndrome, microaggressions and isolation that comes with being black in academia. Furthermore, I understand that many students studying architecture feel similarly misunderstood and unable to find the right support specific to such a uniquely intense course. For me, the most important action point outlined in this publication is the need for specialised pastoral care, so that the anxieties of architecture students can be appropriately dealt with. Pastoral staff should also be trained in EDI so students from all minority backgrounds can access the right support too.

"Tan a yuh yard."

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted inequality across the board. All students wrestled with working from home, some more so than others. My wrestling match was with a deepening plunge into a mental health

crisis. Severely depressed, isolated and eventually unable to receive treatment from the University Health Service as I moved back home, I lost motivation. The strong black mask was beginning to slip but I didn't want to be another BAME Part 1 to Part 2 dropout statistic. Again, I was hesitant to bother stressed out staff who were equally affected by the pandemic. While I am forever grateful for the extensions I was granted, I still stand by my desire for permanent course specific pastoral care staff who I could go to, for the sake of student and staff welfare.

"Black Lives Matter."

I think there is a lack of appreciation for the level of distress caused by seeing imagery of people who look like yourself being abused, murdered and discarded all over social media. The same social media where I am supposed to be cultivating an online portfolio to find work after (virtual) graduation. The murder of George Floyd and accompanying BLM coverage has been tough for Black people around the world. Disappointingly, no support for the movement, or Black students whose mental health may have been affected was offered or signposted by the school, despite claiming to be a 'social' school of architecture.

While it is important to recognise the successes of the Sheffield School of Architecture, particularly those surrounding feminist discourse, the time has come to lift the quarantine on conversations about race in architectural education and the type of the support that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students need. The claim of social awareness must go deeper than a marketing campaign. Though I am now a graduate, I hope that this publication becomes the spark that ignites anti-racist initiatives for future cohorts of students to come.

A POC EXPERIENCE AT SSOA

AAYUSHI BAJWALA

Racism is widespread in the university environment, whether it be microaggressions in a social context or the massive underrepresentation in varying departments. As I am most familiar with the Architecture Department, now going into my third year, this is where my focus will lie. However, you will find that issues of race are deep-seated into the pedagogy of all departments. What I describe below is based solely on my own experiences. It is important to note that everyone experiences discrimination in different ways. My account of racism is most likely not identical to others.

Whilst more women and people of BAME communities are taking up the career in recent years, British architecture is still largely dominated by white men. As a woman of colour studying architecture, I have been described by my peers as a 'role model' for other BAME people considering the profession. My white peers and tutors need to understand the great pressure that follows BAME students being labelled as 'role models' and the lack of support that is offered to us, as the numbers remain small in the profession. This has led to the phenomenon of tokenism within the course.

With only a small number of BAME members at the Sheffield School of Architecture, whiteness is still perceived as a 'default'. Having these 'token minorities' allows institutions to label themselves as diverse, without having enough BAME people to actually achieve inclusivity; this allows minorities to feel alienated in the very place that they are being educated, encouraging a general feeling of 'otherness' or even a phenomena of racial imposter syndrome.

> I want my voice to be heard without being labelled as the voice of all Brown architects.

Being labelled as role models because our race puts a burden on our achievements to be of exceptional nature, rather than being afforded the luxury of white mediocrity; there is a pressure to prove deep-rooted Black and Brown stereotypes - illiterateness and ignorance - wrong. At the university, we have exactly the right number of BAME students and

staff for this effect of 'tokenism' to take place creating a false illusion of diversity.

We have achieved diversity to a certain degree, but not inclusion.

As a response to my recognition of largely Eurocentric course content at the school, it has been suggested that I set up a society which educates about architecture particularly from the Global South. There are many reasons why I was uncomfortable with this; the expectations for people of colour to be responsible for teaching their white peers about the effects of race; the fact that societies are optional and learning about racism is essential for everyone; lastly, the fact that this will allow different cultures to be seen as niche or an 'other'.

One particular concern, due to the recent explosion of the social media coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement followed by the sudden disappearance of it, is the tendency for anti-racism to become a trend, rather than a default set of ethics that should already have been adopted.

The Sheffield School of Architecture is widely seen to focus its teaching towards 'architecture for the people' with its social and sustainability charged ethics and its tendency to teach through a feminist lens. These have become recognisable trends for Sheffield in the global scene of architecture. Sheffield's anti-racism cannot become a trend. Instead we must collaborate with other universities internationally and make a global effort to address the issue of inherent racism in architecture.

Another reality that needs to be recognised is that many BAME people are breaking barriers for people of their race - there must be more acknowledgement of such situations.

It is important to state that BAME people are not disadvantaged by their race or cultural background, but historically, white supremacy has created a paradigm that does not favour them, and even to this day, it shows.

The university must also understand the difficulties of proceeding into a career where we struggle to find any role models to relate to. I am the first woman in my family to attend university and have additionally defied traditional South Asian expectations by treading into a career that is not medicine, dentistry or engineering. I felt great pressure to prove myself in my degree, to my white peers and my South Asian community. A low grade in a project will affect students from different cultural backgrounds and race in a different way. White educators must understand the immense strain that many BAME people face as they go into careers their communities may have never ventured into before.

The lack of support, communication, and identification of such individuals at The University of Sheffield is heart-breaking.

Conversations regarding the effect of race in the profession is one that must take place between staff, students, and alumni in The University of Sheffield. I recall one event this year, after a SUAS talk, in which a BAME member of staff began to describe the racism they had experienced in their career. Once they had finished talking, they were met with complete silence. We must educate ourselves and provide sufficient training to staff and students to have the right conversations in a respectful but effective way, equipping them with the right notions and vocabulary to practice anti-racism. This should help erase white fragility, sensitivity, and defensiveness around the topic, creating an environment where we can finally talk about it. The topic of race should be one that is revisited as it is one that is truly relevant in the architectural social sphere.

This is also a plea to better pastoral care for BAME students suffering from feelings of 'otherness', exclusion or racial imposter syndrome in the School. I look back to a year meeting in my second year where we were presented with a list of staff that were available to give support to students. They were all white men. I would like to make a request for a support system in place for BAME students, in which they can approach members of staff that have been through similar experiences and can offer solutions to problems they can understand and relate to. A student body approach to the issue, is no longer sufficient. The university, itself, must act.

I do acknowledge the support that is offered at the university such as Race Equality Champions, launched in January, to tackle microaggressions. However, these services are only sought out by BAME people affected by racism, when we should all be taking responsibility to recognise, talk about and tackle it.

I hope that the School of Architecture will respond to this eagerly and aspire to become an actively anti-racist institution, making changes that will have a long-lasting effect and solve the inequalities that are deeply embedding in the architecture profession.

I wanted to write this to expose the effect that Black Lives Matter has had on BAME students. Much of the summer, for me, has been an internal thought process - picking apart small microaggressions, reflecting on my own biases and privileges as a non-black person of colour, and finally recognising the bigger picture of how systemic racism is embedded in much of what we do at university and everyday life. It has been a slow but effective realisation and this piece of writing is a fragment of my complicated thought process during this difficult time. I feel hopeful, as I have been met with similar attitudes and opinions from my peers and I

would like to thank those who have shared their experiences and made efforts to push for a more inclusive environment in the school.

I feel positive that the Sheffield School of Architecture will support these efforts. By addressing these issues of race inclusivity in the department we will be taking massive steps for the entire field. We must, as a collective, utilise the strength and power we have as a successful and internationally recognised school to challenge issues we see in the architectural profession. With our platforms and leverage we can act on our beliefs to reach for a future in which there is a fairer and better society.

We must not be scared of the difficult conversations.

There is no excuse and it is the responsibility of the entire SSoA community.

We must all stand together and take responsibility, using our powers as staff and students to truly enact change.